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OLD FALCON'S DOUBLE

NELLY SHERWOOD, AS THE SHAM FALCONBRIDGE, OR IN THE CHARACTER OF THE
FALCON DETECTIVE'S DOUBLE, WAS REVEALED.

OR, THE GREAT DETECTIVE'S FINISHING STROKE.

A Tale of Detective Art and Adventure,
in New York and Abroad, Afloat
and Ashore.

BY JACKSON KNOX,
(OLD HAWK.)

AUTHOR OF "THE CIRCUS DETECTIVE," "OLD
GRIP," "SPRINGSTEEL STEVE," "THE
HARBOR DETECTIVE," "OLD
GRIP'S GRIP," ETC.

CHAPTER I. THE VERDICT.

"GUILTY!"

Such was the verdict of the jury, after a de-
liberation of little more than an hour.

It was in a case of the People vs. Charles
Howland, on trial for forgery.

Though in the nature of the evidence scarcely
any other verdict could have been expected, the
prisoner, by his youth, manliness, and beauty of

person, had made many friends among the spectators, there were yet others who deemed that he might be the innocent victim of incriminating circumstances, and the foreman's words, "Guilty as charged in the indictment," caused a general thrill of sympathy and regret to pass through the crowded court-room.

Miss Nellie Sherwood, the young lady who was understood to be the prisoner's sweetheart, and who had stood by him loyally from the very first, was observed to turn deadly white, and to start up, as if about to speak or cry out before submitting to be drawn back, with a quieting whisper, by her father, Colonel Ezra Sherwood, who sat at her side.

This latter was the Wall street banker by whom the prisoner, together with John Burley, his chief accuser, had been employed as a clerk.

As for the prisoner himself, he seemed to have been thoroughly prepared for an adverse verdict, and beyond a slight tightening of the muscles of his pale cheek, there was no betrayal of the inner shock that its enunciation must have cost him.

His lawyer leaned forward, pressing his hand, and whispered something which was generally understood to be a question as to whether or not a stay of sentence should be demanded as a preliminary to the argument for a new trial.

Charles Howland shook his head decisively, and then, carefully refraining from a glance in Miss Sherwood's direction, lest the sight of her grief-stricken face might unnerve him, calmly arose, facing the judge, the jury, and his principal accuser.

The latter was a small, dark, and foreign-looking young man, the prisoner's senior by several years, and seeming much his inferior in every respect by contrast, but, at the same time, with an expression indicative of native resolution and force, not unallied with subtler and perhaps sinister characteristics.

"Your Honor," said the prisoner, in a clear, penetrating voice, "notwithstanding the verdict is unfortunately against me, and that I must bow submissively to its mandate, I can only repeat, in simple justice to myself, that I am innocent."

"There," pointing to his whilom fellow-clerk with contemptuous scorn, "sits the villain who has ruined my reputation! None knows better than he that it was from *him* I received the fatal check, in payment for money that he had borrowed of me. If his signature thereto was so unlike its accustomed aspect as to be pronounced a forgery at the bank on which it was drawn, he plotted to make it so in order to effect my ruin, not only with my employer and the world at large, but with the girl I love, and in whose graces he had vainly endeavored to supplant me by fairer means.

"Unfortunately, the check was given to me by this scoundrel without witnesses, and I have had no evidence to support my simple declaration to this effect.

"I can only say, your Honor, that I bow to the inevitable, but I do not despair. You can sentence me at your pleasure. But I feel it in my heart that my innocence will ere long be made known to all men."

The sensation produced by such an address as this, under the extraordinary circumstances that evoked it, can be better imagined than described.

It was increased immeasurably, as the prisoner quietly resumed his seat, by Miss Sherwood swiftly and resolutely passing to his side, regardless of efforts on the part of her father and several lady friends to restrain, and silently giving him her hand.

Howland looked up with intense surprise and gratitude, the color for the first time springing into his pale face, while the deathly whiteness of hers remained unchanged.

He simply returned her hand-pressure, and she quietly resumed her seat at her father's side—that was all.

It was over in an instant, but it was a strikingly dramatic incident, such as our matter-of-fact American court-rooms seldom afford.

The extreme beauty of the young woman—a superb brunette of twenty-two or three, in all the glory of her freshly matured womanhood; the comeliness of the prisoner, fair, stalwart, noble and ingenuous, perhaps her senior by but two or three years; the agitation of his slender and Spanish-appearing accuser, who had half-started from his seat with parted lips and furious eyes; the evident mortification of the young woman's father and feminine friends; all contributed their share to the intense realism of an instant which yet seemed like the intensest fragment torn out of an emotional drama's thrilling heart.

The murmurous stir among the spectators of this strange scene amounted almost to disorder.

The clerk of the court rapped sharply with his gavel, the judge briefly announced that he would defer passing sentence until the following day, and the accused was led away to prison.

He did not pass from sight, however, without catching a farewell glance from Miss Sherwood so full of trust and encouragement as to cause renewed hope in his aching heart.

Colonel Sherwood was regarded as a very wealthy man; his residence was a stately one in the neighborhood of Mount Morris Park, Har-

lem, and his circle was of that which has come to be designated as the "upper crust." He had long been a widower, and Nelly was his only child.

While the colonel and his party were about entering a couple of carriages, after descending from the court-room, John Burley came hurrying up to them.

"Colonel?" said the young man, interrogatively.

"What is it, Burley?" and the banker turned gravely, but urbanely, to his questioner.

"My concern is so great, sir," continued the clerk, "that I cannot forbear speaking to you on the spot before returning to my office duties. I do hope, sir, that Howland's unjust aspersion of character and motives in those last words which he addressed to the court could not have impressed you against me!"

There was an outward entreaty in his manner, underlaid by a covert boldness that could not have been noticed by any one save the person directly addressed, and which he for some reason did not resent.

"Dismiss your anxiety, Burley," replied Colonel Sherwood, easily. "The evidence was so conclusive against Howland that I do not see how any importance could have been attached to his exasperated last words, pity him as we may. Such is my opinion, at least."

"And you, Miss Sherwood?" Burley turned eagerly to the girl as she was about stepping into the carriage.

She turned to him with an icy indifference more absolutely crushing than her scorn could have been.

"Sir, I have nothing to say—at present," she replied.

A moment later they drove off, leaving the young man looking gloomily after them from the sidewalk.

"So, my proud beauty!" he muttered. "However, the coast is clear for me at last! You cannot possibly marry my accursed rival now, howsoever you may want to; and, with the hold I have got upon your father's honor, if you are not my wife before my miserable dupe is out of prison, my name is not Juan Burleo, and there is no Spanish Creole blood in my veins."

The trial had ended at noon of the second day.

Colonel Sherwood had driven with his party to lunch at a neighboring down-town restaurant, chiefly because he thought that Nelly was looking faint and required it, and notwithstanding her remonstrance to the contrary.

Besides the father and daughter, the party consisted of Miss Jerusha Bigbee, a strong-minded maiden aunt of Nelly's, a poor relation who lived with them in the capacity of house-keeper, and Florine Duprez, Miss Sherwood's French maid, a very stylish-appearing and self-possessed young woman, indeed.

After lunch, the colonel, still anxious about his daughter, and aware of the mental anguish she had long been sustaining on her unfortunate lover's account, accompanied them home on the Elevated cars.

Following upon the verdict, Nelly had borne herself with a thoughtful calmness and fortitude that had puzzled him not a little, notwithstanding what he knew of her exceptional nerve and strength of character.

Therefore, directly after the arrival home, he said to her: "My dear child, if you are not too deeply distressed, I should like to talk with you in the library a few moments."

"Certainly, papa," she replied, in her self-contained way. "I shall merely change my gown, and be with you in a few moments."

CHAPTER II.

A BRAVE GIRL'S RESOLVE.

"Now, papa!"

Nelly had changed her dress for a handsome in-door toilette, and was calmly seated in her father's elegant library, facing him.

Colonel Sherwood was a well-preserved, even fashionable man of sixty, or thereabouts, somewhat democratic in his tendencies, but much given to club life and high living.

He hemmed and hawed a little as a preliminary to what he was about to say. If the truth must be told, he was often more or less ill at ease with this beautiful and strong-souled only daughter of his, who, besides being of legal age, with a will and intelligence to decide for herself which he felt to be superior to like qualities in himself, was possessed of a considerable fortune in her own right, an inheritance from her maternal grandfather.

"My dear, it is just this," Colonel Sherwood at last blurted out. "Apart from what you may have suffered, and doubtless still suffer, on account of young Howland's ras—ur—well, we will say misfortune—and which, of course, puts him out of the question as to further intimacy with him, I—I do wish you would be a little less offish—a little more complacent, you know—with young Burley."

Nelly had half-expected the words, and consequently was not taken by surprise.

"Why?" she quietly asked.

Her father gave her a troubled look before answering. He knew that, with her penetration, beating about the bush was superfluous.

"I shall tell you, Nelly," he replied. "In the first place he is, I believe, a really worthy young fellow, and I know he loves you to distraction."

"Anything else, papa?" still unmovedly.

"Yes," with hesitating hurriedness. "He has discovered a business secret of mine—an accursed secret of my past, regretted, but too late to recall or amend—which, to a certain degree, places me in his power. There you are!"

Miss Sherwood remained thoughtful for a moment, after which the slight cloud that had gathered upon the smileless melancholy of her face cleared away.

"So be it, papa," she quietly answered. "Since such is your wish, I shall be less 'offish,' if not exactly more complacent, with Mr. Burley, in the future."

Colonel Sherwood at once rose and kissed his daughter heartily.

He had intended to ask more than this of her in Burley's behalf, but was content, knowing her temper, with having gained this much as a preparative.

"What a dear, submissive little darling you are, Nelly!" he exclaimed. "You have relieved me more than you can imagine. Fact is, I don't know of any young business man in New York I'd sooner become more intimate with in a family sense than John Burley. Sha'n't keep you any longer, dear." He took up his hat, and cast a critical eye down over his altogether irreproachable exterior. "There is time left for a run down to my office. And by the way, Nelly, I shall probably dine at my club this evening."

"Good-by, papa!"

After he was gone, she remained seated as he had left her, her head leaning on her hand, her figure and attitude the picture of refined and unconscious grace.

He could go to his club and enjoy himself while Charles Howland, his whilom friend and most trusted clerk, whom he also knew to have been the lover of her heart, was languishing in prison, the innocent victim of a jealous scoundrel's plot, and with the certainty of the State Prison staring him in the face!

"However, Nelly's face again cleared, and there was something like pity mingled with the resoluteness that came into it.

Poor weak papa!" she murmured. "However, I shall soon place it out of your power to surrender to your own weakness or make me the slave of it."

She bestirred herself, rung for her maid, and, when the latter had appeared, turned to a writing-table and wrote briskly.

"Telegraph this dispatch for me, Florine, my dear," she said, handing over a slip of writing, "wait for the answer, and bring it to me without delay. I would send one of the men-servants, but that it is too confidential a matter to intrust with any one but yourself."

Florine thanked her young mistress for her good opinion, and went off upon her errand.

In half an hour, she returned with the following return-dispatch:

"Will be with you in less than two hours."

"H. A. SPENDER."

H. A. Spender was the head of a prominent firm of criminal lawyers, and was Nelly's second cousin on the maternal side. He had defended Charles Howland in the forgery case. He had known Nelly from her infancy, and conjoined with his admiration for her character a pronounced dislike for the colonel, her father, whom he regarded as without principle in business, and of morals none too strict in private life. He was himself a thoroughly honest man, though with an enthusiasm for his profession, and a proportionate fondness for sensational effects.

Nelly busied herself with various matters about the house, and had a long chat with her aunt, Miss Bigbee, on the latter's favorite topic, woman suffrage, with a vivacity that caused the good woman to wonder whether she had really forgotten her lover's misfortune, or was masking the anguish of a breaking heart under the cap and bells of a forced good-humor.

But when Mr. Hugh Spender promptly arrived from his down-town Center-street office, at about four o'clock in the afternoon, Miss Sherwood was calmly awaiting him in the library.

"Don't interrupt me by a word, save to answer my questions, until I finish with my proposition, Cousin Hugh," she said, in her brisk, business-like way as soon as he had seated himself. "I know you did everything that could be done for Charles. You have seen him in prison since the verdict?"

"Just quitted him to run up here," was the reply.

"What will be the sentence?"

"No more than three years, I am quite certain. The judge is very well disposed in the matter."

Nelly's face lightened, and a perceptible shiver ran through her frame, but she was her brave self again in an instant.

"Cousin Hugh, I have resolved upon a daring project. You must help me."

"With all my heart, and in anything you

propose," replied the lawyer, simply. "Only don't think of planning a jail-breaking for Howland, as it is out of the question."

"I am not thinking of anything of the sort. He will go to State Prison, but he will go there as *my husband!* I wish to be married to him in his city prison cell to-night. The ceremony must be secret. I trust you to manage the affair."

Spender looked at her in amazement, but she went on to explain her position and determination, without giving him a chance to interpose a remark.

"Here is the situation, Cousin Hugh. You know Charles Howland to be innocent, no less than I?"

"I'd take my oath to it fifty times over!"

"And you doubtless likewise believe him the victim of John Burley's plotting hatred."

"Yes, I do!"

"Perhaps you are not aware that Charles Howland and I were betrothed a short time before this blow fell upon him?"

"I have suspected it, especially since his peech in court this morning."

"Good! My father wishes me to marry that villain, John Burley."

"What?"

"Wait! He has not yet ventured to tell me so in as many words, but he gave me a hint in that direction to-day. Burley has in some way got my father in his power, or my father chooses to think so, and my father is both vain and weak."

"I should say so," dryly.

"I would rescue him from his own weakness, no less than myself. My secret marriage to Charles Howland, which I can declare at any time in my own protection, will accomplish this. Besides being a lawyer of prominence, you are a politician of influence. I am absolutely resolved in this matter, and you know enough of me to know what that means with me. The only difficulty will be to induce Charles to accept my proposition, under the circumstances. This you must overcome. In fact, I rely upon you to manage the whole affair for me with the requisite secrecy. Papa dines at his club, and, after his custom, will not be home till late. The affair will take place this evening. My maid, Florine, will accompany me as one witness. You must provide another of your own sex, together with the officiating clergyman. Shall I depend on you?"

Lawyer Hugh Spender rose, and paced the room, his mind in a momentary whirl. With any other young woman of his esteemed acquaintance, he would have argued against the projected step as a species of sentimental madness; with Eleanor Sherwood he knew that this would be a waste of breath, and, moreover, in view of his belief in Howland's probity and victimization, he could not but admire the invincibility of her devotion to the man of her heart.

"Yes, you may," he at length replied. "Be in readiness when I call for you at seven o'clock this evening. But there is much to do, and scant time for me to do it in." He consulted his watch. "I must be off."

"Thank you, Cousin Hugh. You shall find me in readiness."

She gave him her hand, and he hurried away.

CHAPTER III.

A STRANGE MARRIAGE.

THE time of the year was June, the month of roses, when in fine weather the twilight lingers long and late, and it chanced to be fine now.

At about half-past seven o'clock of the evening of that eventful day, Charles Howland sat in his Tombs prison-cell, a prey to such conflicting emotions as he had never before conceived as possible in his existence.

Half an hour previously his lawyer had quitted him, after explaining Nelly Sherwood's proposition, and extorting his consent to it. Should he have permitted this sacrifice, this tremendous devotion on the part of the girl he loved to distraction?

Or was it, in reality, a sacrifice? Knowing his own innocence, as he did, was it any more than sentimentally fair that he should accept this noble proof of her confidence in his truth and honor, notwithstanding the prison walls immuring him, the dishonoring sentence that was staring him remorselessly in the face?

Then there was her laudable desire to absolutely baffle the presumed expectations of his accused enemy's cowardly plottings on the spot, and place herself irrevocably beyond the villain's hopes, no less than beyond whatever importunities her father's weakness might ultimately prompt him to make in the plotter's behalf.

However, sacrifice or no sacrifice, his acceptance of it had been obtained, and there was an end.

The cell he occupied was comparatively large and luxurious in its furnishings, just as it had been left, in fact, by a rich and powerful connected defaulter who had last occupied it.

The earlier twilight was still lingering agreeably throughout the strong room, when steps in the stone-paved corridor aroused its inmate.

They paused before his grating, and a key was heard being inserted in the lock.

As Howland arose, the door opened, and Spender entered the cell, accompanied by Eleanor, who collectedly stepped up to her lover and took his hand, speaking a few reassuring words with a slight tremor, as sole evidence of the agonized effort with which she controlled the agitation natural to the occasion.

They were followed by a clerical looking gentleman, whom Howland recognized as a popular minister, by a well-dressed, discreet appearing man, whom the lawyer briefly introduced as his friend Mr. Thompson, and by Florine, who greeted the prisoner, with whom she was well-acquainted, with a swift, interested look, while at the same time preserving much modesty of demeanor.

When the party were all within the cell, which they came very near to filling completely, the voice of the turnkey without was heard to say, in a low tone, "Remember, Mr. Spender, twenty minutes and no longer."

Then the door closed again, and was locked behind them.

Howland, notwithstanding he had fervently responded to the pressure of his sweetheart's soft, ungloved hand, had continued to view the whole affair with a species of bewilderment, not to say stupor.

Then, as if to arouse himself, he turned to Spender, with a pitiful half-smile under his blonde mustache.

"All this must be oddly opposed to the prison regulations," was all he could think to say. "How on earth have you managed it?"

"Never mind as to that," was the brisk reply. "It was difficult work, I can tell you. But, time is precious Mr. —," to the minister, "everything is in readiness, I believe."

The clergyman was also a man of ready wit, who had been primed for the exigencies of the occasion.

He bade the pair stand before him, the accustomed marriage rite was performed, without even omitting the putting on of the wedding ring, which the lawyer's thoughtfulness had provided, and Charles Howland and Eleanor Sherwood were pronounced man and wife.

Pen and ink were then forthcoming, the clergyman seated himself at a little table and made out the marriage-certificate, which was duly signed by Thompson and Florine as witnesses.

The document was handed to the bride, who carefully slipped it into the bosom of her perfectly fitting but inconspicuous walking-dress without a word.

This completed the legality of the ceremony in every particular, no marriage license being required as indispensable by the statutes of the State of New York.

Scarcely had the affair been completed when there came a warning rap on the outside of the door.

"Time's up!" exclaimed Spender, hastily exchanging a farewell hand-grip with the newly married prisoner, while whispering a few encouraging words. "Come, all!"

With that he purposely turned his back upon the couple, and advanced toward the door, in which action he was instantly imitated by the clergyman, Florine and her fellow-witness.

The married lovers embraced, and their lips clung together in the kiss that was at once their greeting and their farewell, their union and yet their temporary divorce.

"My love, my darling, be brave!" Howland heard the beloved voice whisper, as through the mist-wreaths of a dream; "in less than a month you shall be free!"

Then somehow his arms were empty, there was the sound of the opening and closing of the door; he sunk into a seat by the little table, and, when he came to a realization of his surroundings, he was once more alone in his solitude, with the death's-head of that anticipated State Prison sentence grinning in his face.

But its grin was less appalling as he more thoroughly realized what had befallen him.

What are prison solitude and prison disgrace to the consciousness of rectitude in the virtuous soul of their sufferer, together with the divine love and confidence of the glorious woman on 's heart?

Others had borne in patience these wrongs, even less cheered and supported than he, and should he prove less patient and brave than they?

Besides, in addition to those encouraging last words of Eleanor's amid the ecstasies of her bridal kiss, Hugh Spender, in exchanging that parting hand-clasp with him, had whispered these words, in that cheery, encouraging voice of his:

"Be of good heart, my boy! Falconbridge, the missing Falcon Detective, shall yet be found, and through his means the missing witnesses to Burley's giving you that incriminating check be yet unearthed. At all events, neither Eleanor nor I shall rest till your innocence is proven and you are free!"

Then, for the first time, moreover, Howland became sensible of a delicious and subtle perfume in close connection with his person.

It was not the divine atmosphere of his be-

loved, the lingering aura of her vanished embrace, though that, too, was present to his spiritual sense.

This was the perfume of a flower, a delicate attar appealing to the physical sense.

He quickly discovered its source in a full-blown Jacqueminot rose, which she had doubtless thrust into his bosom in the passion and anguish of that first and last embrace.

While pressing the flower passionately to his lips, he was aware of something dangling from its stem, and fastened thereto by a silken cord, which he recognized as one of Nelly's favorite diamond rings, and which would just fit the little finger of his left hand!

Examining it carefully at the grating of his door, there was still enough light from the adjoining corridor to enable his keen eyesight to discover and read on the inside of the ring an inscription, evidently newly engraved there, these words:

"Forever thine!"

It was no dream; all was real and substantial. The horror of Howland's situation faded from his understanding.

He threw himself upon his prison couch, and slept the sleep of the innocent, the hopeful and the just.

On appearing in court for sentence the following morning, with Hugh Spender at his side, he expressed his gratitude that Eleanor was not present.

"I divined your sensibilities in the matter, my boy," was the lawyer's reply, "and persuaded her to stay away."

"The marriage?" queried Howland.

"Is an absolute dead secret until Eleanor herself sees fit to divulge it."

The judge then, with a few brief remarks as to the fairness of the trial and the inevitability of the conviction, sentenced the prisoner to two years and six months in State Prison.

As Howland was being led away, he caught Burley's triumphant glance from among the many that were curiously bent upon him, but he passed on with an air of perfect indifference.

CHAPTER IV.

WANTED, A DETECTIVE.

THE alleged forged check, upon which Charles Howland's conviction and sentence had been secured, had, according to the prisoner's own statement, this history, in brief:

A year or so previous to the trial, when Burley and he were still on excellent terms, notwithstanding that both were paying like assiduous court to their employer's beautiful daughter, with no decided evidence as to which she preferred, if either, the elder clerk had persuaded the other to lend him five hundred dollars out of his savings to meet a pressing need, the nature of which, however, he could not or would not explain.

As Howland knew his friend's habits to be fairly good, or at least was quite certain that they did not include the vice of gambling, and as, moreover, there was a strong friendship existing between them at the time, he had granted the loan without hesitation and without security, as a purely personal service.

Considerably later on, when Miss Sherwood's preference for Howland over his rival had become more or less pronounced, the intimacy of the young men naturally cooled, especially on Burley's part, though he still managed to mask his growing animosity against his rival, and continued to visit Miss Sherwood as if tacitly aware of, yet resigned to, his ill-fortune.

Nothing had been said about the borrowed money, though, as the months slipped away without Burley making any illusion to it, Howland felt more or less uneasy, and doubtless betrayed as much in his manner.

But one evening, at last, when they were on their way up-town together, Burley had agreeably surprised him by saying abruptly, and with assumed cordiality:

"Howland, old fellow, I have at last received the proceeds of my mother's estate in the West Indies, and am in a position to pay you back that money you were so generous and trusting as to accommodate me with. Come in here and have some wine with me [they were footling it leisurely up Broadway, and had come to a pause before a well-known wine room,] and I will give you a check for the amount, together with my thanks, which have already been so long delayed that I am more than half ashamed of myself."

Much gratified, Howland had cheerfully accompanied him into the place.

Here, when wine had been furnished them in one of the private compartments, Burley hastily filled out and signed a check for the original amount of the loan (Howland having peremptorily declined to accept of interest) with a fountain pen, which his companion had never seen him possess or use before, though he did not think of remarking upon the matter at the time.

The check had been accepted with thanks, after a cursory glance at the amount, and there was an end for the time being.

But two or three days later on, when Howland presented the check at an up-town bank on which it was drawn, and with whose officials he

was unfamiliar, the signature was unhesitatingly pronounced to be a forgery.

In vain did the young man protest, and explain the manner in which he had seen it written by the owner of the signature itself before it was placed into his possession. It was no use. John Burley had funds on deposit to a considerable amount, but the signature was evidently at variance with that—a peculiar one—with which he had made the teller acquainted, though a rather clever imitation of the same. Even Howland had to confess, on examining the signature carefully, that it differed materially from the manner in which Burley was accustomed to write it, and notwithstanding that he had seen him affix this one under his very eyes.

He was given into custody, and, at his request, both Colonel Sherwood and John Burley sent for.

On their arrival, the latter had coolly and peremptorily denied having ever given the check, which he pronounced to be a cunning forgery. This he did while admitting his indebtedness to Howland, and even admitting the adjournment into the wine room, but that was all. He not only contemptuously denied having written anything while there, but also solemnly avowed that he had never owned such a thing as a fountain-pen, or even held one in his hand. He ended by loading his whilom comrade with the bitterest of reproaches and accusations.

Howland was so horror-struck and stupefied at this unexpected treachery that his manner was mistaken for conclusive evidence of his guilt by most of those present, but also by Colonel Sherwood, who had theretofore rather favored him as his daughter's prospective husband, though of the secret opinion that she might have aimed higher and done better.

He was forthwith committed to prison, and his indictment soon followed.

Out on bail furnished by his betrothed, he devoted the brief period between his indictment and the time set for his trial in a vain effort to find two of the wine room waiters who he felt certain had been at least partial witnesses to the signing and delivery of the check. In this he was heartily aided by his lawyer, Hugh Spender, but it was without avail. The waiters had mysteriously disappeared from their employment—presumably at Burley's instance—and were undiscoverable.

Then they sought to have recourse to the services of Falconbridge, the celebrated Falcon Detective. But, unfortunately he was abroad on some secret mission of importance, accompanied by his able little assistant, Tommy Dodd, and there was no telling even how a communication would reach him.

The services of other detectives of less ability were sought, but to no purpose, and the day fixed for the trial was at hand with nothing having been effected for the defense.

However, conscious of his innocence, Howland would listen to no proposition for a motion for a postponement on the part of his counsel.

The trial did come on, and with the result we have seen.

On the evening of the day that Howland received his sentence, the faithful lawyer, Hugh Spender, called upon Eleanor by appointment.

She received him in a small parlor between the main drawing-room and the library, and exhibited, undiminished, the iron firmness and resolve that were such an exceptional adjunct of her youth and beauty, to say nothing of her sex itself, though there was a painful seriousness in her face and manner, whose wont was that of smiling cheerfulness and vivacity, that told of the suffering the cruel situation was costing her.

"You saw Charles depart?" was her first query.

"Yes."

"How did he demean himself?"

"As when being sentenced, like a hero, or rather like a philosopher. The ceremony of last night seemed to have given him new life and hope."

"Heaven be praised for that, Hugh! You are sure the ceremony will be kept a secret?"

"Perfectly sure, so far as the clergyman, my witness and the prison people are concerned. You must answer for Florine yourself."

"I think I can do that without anxiety. I have treated the young woman well, she has never yet abused my confidence, and I am certain is thoroughly devoted to me."

"She is handsome and French, however."

"That is nothing. You should get over your prejudices against everything French."

"I can't," replied Spender, who was excessively native American in his private thoughts and feelings.

"That is not well. But now as to the absent detective, Falconbridge."

"Not a sign of him as yet," was the somewhat desponding reply. "He is thief-chasing somewhere in Turkey or Roumania, is all I have been able to learn. The old story!"

Here there was heard a movement in the adjoining library.

"Listeners!" muttered Eleanor, in a low voice.

She forthwith darted into the library, by the communicating door, like a flash.

CHAPTER V.

THE DETECTIVE'S SUBSTITUTE.

THE lawyer heard voices, then a soft little laugh, which he recognized as Florine's, followed by the opening and closing of a door.

Then Eleanor reappeared, looking very much relieved.

"It was only Florine," she said. "She was looking for a French work I had given her permission to read at leisure."

"Is she in the habit of looking for reading matter *in the dark?*" asked Spender, dryly. "There is no light in there."

"But a fair reflection from the light in this room, and the French works are all in one compartment of the shelves. Give over your senseless suspicions, Cousin Hugh, or you and I may fall out."

"My suspicions are throttled from this instant," my dear Nelly, with a short laugh.

"Did you visit the wine-room to inquire afresh?"

"Yes, but with no better success. Nothing has been heard or imagined of the missing waiters."

"Did you succeed in procuring me another and better photograph of Falconbridge, as I requested?"

"Here is one in a different attitude," replied Spender, producing and handing over a photograph of the imperial size. "But I doubt if it is better than the one already in your possession."

The young woman scanned the picture with critical eagerness.

It was a full-length, representing the famous detective, dressed in a summer suit, with his hat on, and in an easy attitude.

"You are right," she said. "It is no better than the first you obtained for me last week, nor so good. Still, there is a variety of his expression."

The lawyer laughed, for he had not yet been able to discover her purpose in making herself so familiar with the Falcon Detective's characteristics, save that she might be contemplating a search for him abroad.

"Be careful to retain Howland's image firmly in mind, my dear cousin," he said. "Falconbridge is still a deuced handsome fellow, though perhaps twenty years the other's senior!"

"Peste!" impatiently, but not offended; "and dark as myself, while Charley is the loveliest blonde in the world, to say nothing of the detective being rather under-sized in comparison."

"That is true."

"Will you excuse me a few minutes, Hugh? This dress I am wearing is uncomfortable."

"A perfect toilette, nevertheless, and fitting you like a glove."

"Still I must make a change. Amuse yourself with that portfolio of new engravings yonder."

And with that she rustled out of the room in her swift but graceful way.

Ten or fifteen minutes later, while Spender was rather uninterestedly examining the engravings, he heard the street door open and close softly, as if some one might have stealthily entered.

Not having heard the bell ring, and pretty certain that the footman was not in attendance at the door, he was about to step into the hall with the expectation of confronting a felonious intruder, when steps were heard on the marble flagging.

Then a figure entered the room from the hall, the sight of which caused the lawyer to spring to his feet with joyful astonishment.

"Falconbridge!" he exclaimed, running to grasp the intruder's gloved hand. "Good heavens! but this is a stroke of luck. Where on earth did you spring from?"

Spender had long been well-acquainted with the famous detective, who now smiled in his sphinxian manner, seemingly much pleased with his welcome, as he quietly took a proffered chair while speaking some explanatory words.

"Only arrived home from the Levant to-day at noon, you see, my dear fellow," he said, depositing his hat on the table, but retaining his kids. "Heard that I had been in much demand by your fair cousin and yourself of late, and here I am."

"Ah! but too late to avert the catastrophe we were so desirous of your help in preventing," exclaimed Spender, dejectedly.

"So I have learned; but what is broken may be mended. I do not see Miss Sherwood, and I wish you to introduce me to her."

"Gone up-stairs to change her dress. Am expecting her return every minute. Never doubt that she will hail your presence no less enthusiastically than I have done. Good Lord! but this is a surprise."

"Glad you find it an agreeable one, Mr. Spender."

"Agreeable? It's immense! But how did you enter the house so noiselessly?"

"Didn't you hear me ring, and the servant open the door to me?"

"No."

"Neither did I. The door was unlocked, and I made bold to helping myself to an entrance. It's a way of mine."

"Ah, I remember enough of your mysterious ways, you rogue!"

"What is a detective without his mystery?"

"True. But how did you happen home so opportunely for us?"

"Chance, I suppose."

"Did you receive our dispatches of inquiry to Smyrna and elsewhere?"

"No; haven't been to Smyrna, or anywhere else either where any dispatch of inquiry would be likely to reach me."

"Where have you been, Falconbridge?"

"Damascus is remote, my friend, and the surrounding desert not easy to particularize."

"The deuce! away out yonder in the Orient?"

"Yes."

"Did you accomplish your purpose?"

"I believe I am not in the habit of failing in that, Spender."

"Your vaunt is pardonable there, Falconbridge. I trust in Heaven you may help us out of our present difficulty with your accustomed success."

"That is what I am here for now. Give me your particulars. Of course I have already received an inkling of the case, or I should not be on hand so promptly. But I must know everything. Something about missing witnesses, I believe!"

"Yes." And the lawyer forthwith gave a brief history of the case.

"Ah, I see," commented the detective, after giving an earnest attention to the recital. "Waiters both vanished, eh?"

"Tee-totally!"

"Proprietors of wine-room been thoroughly pumped?"

"Yes, but to no purpose. Oh, they're all right. The rascals even left unpaid wages behind them."

"Sol Other employees been questioned?"

"Yes, and with promised rewards for the required information."

"And to no purpose whatever?"

"None."

"Are you quite sure that there are any missing waiters to be found, whose testimony would be of any advantage to Howland?"

"Bless your heart, yes! I'd answer for the unfortunate young man's veracity with my life."

"And you a criminal lawyer?"

"Exactly; just the same." And, in his surprise at the other's cynical tone, Spender fell to examining him more closely as he sat a little apart, with his dark face well-shaded from the large reading-lamp by which the room was lighted.

"Humph!" was the detective's laconic response.

"How much darker you are than of old, Falconbridge!" irrelevantly observed the lawyer; "and you were always swarthy enough. The sun must toast a fellow wonderfully out there in the deserts of the Levant."

"It does," quietly.

"And you have somehow grown softer and more delicately-featured, too."

"Like enough—a queer climate out yonder at Damascus!" And then with some impatience:

"But I wish the young lady might make her appearance, as I am pressed for time."

"I can't think what can keep her so long; but she will doubtless be here in a few minutes."

"Perhaps," indifferently, "that secret marriage with Charles Howland, the convict last night may have told upon her nerves by this time."

Hugh Spender sprung to his feet with a muted exclamation of surprise.

"A dead secret, as we have flattered ourselves!" he exclaimed, starting aimlessly for the door. "How on earth did you come by it, man?"

"Wait!" and, also rising, the detective detained him with his left gloved hand. "Is there anything Falconbridge, the detective, fails to discover as a preliminary to hard work?"

For answer Spender grasped the hand that was upon his arm.

"Finger-rings under your glove!" he cried; "and a mighty small hand at that. What does this mean?"

A mocking laugh, bursting from the other's lips in womanish silveriness, completed the lawyer's bewilderment, and then, with a shake of the head that tumbled a torrent of glossy black hair down over her shoulders, Nelly Sherwood, as the sham Falconbridge, or in the character of the Falcon Detective's Double, was revealed.

CHAPTER VI.

A FIRST ESSAY.

HUGH SPENDER threw up his hands, and then plumped himself down into his chair again.

"Well, I'm—blessed!" was all he could say, with his eyes still fixed upon the clever and beautiful girl who had deceived him so absolutely.

"Acknowledge that I have borne out my part tolerably well!" She was doing up her hair again now.

"Tolerably well? It is simply perfect!"

"No risk of my masquerade being suspected on the streets or elsewhere?"

"Not the slightest. Didn't you deceive me, and to the full?"

"Oh, you!"

"Well, I'm not exactly a yokel in the detection of disguises, if I say it myself. You're the living image, the exact double, of the great detective."

"Truly?"

"Well, if there's any variation, it's in your refinement of feature, together with your voice, the imitation not being absolutely exact. But the discrepancies are so slight as scarcely to be noticed by his most intimate professional associates. How, in the name of all that's wonderful, have you managed it?"

"Oh, the explanation is easy. In the first place, you know my past success in private theatricals?"

"I should say so; and, now I think of it, especially in male parts."

"Yes. Well, I have been studying the great detective's character and appearance ever since I received that first photograph of him from you, while my tailor has made me several suits to correspond under my directions. Then Florine has assisted me materially with the cosmetics, the age, or masculine face-marks, and so on, so that now I can effect the transposition back into my true character, or vice versa, in very short order."

"But how do you manage with your hair?"

"Don't you see how I am managing with it now? Though I could certainly do a little better before my mirror, and with Florine's assistance."

She had by this time, in some deft and mysterious way, packed her abundant, glossy hair tightly over her head, so that it seemed but the groundwork for numerous short, thick-curling, dark locks disposed in such a masculine fashion as would have sufficiently deluded the most penetrating of observers.

"There you are, cousin mine!"

She calmly took up her hat, and was once more before him as the living double of the Falcon Detective at his best.

Nothing seemed wanting. Easy, rather careless summer dress and unconsciously graceful attitude, suggestive of both symmetry and muscular power, were alike perfect. Even the eagle look in the dark eyes, the firm non-committal expression under the black mustache, the crow's-feet about the corners of the eyes, the mingling lines of growing years and past hardships in the dark, still handsome face, with its blended expression of keen intelligence, sphinxian reserve and latent power—all were there in counterfeit presentment wonderful to behold.

A very critical examination might have evolved the discovery that Falconbridge, in this copy of him, had become shortened by an inch or two, that there was a somewhat abnormal fullness of the chest, not theretofore noticeable in his physique, and that he had somehow acquired a certain delicacy of feature and softening of the falcon glance from the deep, dark and mysterious eyes, but that was all, and very critical examinations are not to be apprehended either from strangers, or on the part of those with whom we have, presumably, enjoyed a life-long acquaintance or even familiarity.

Spender had studied his transformed cousin at this pass with an admiration that had gradually deepened into thoughtfulness.

"You'll do, Nelly," he said. "It is simply wonderful, and out-does anything I ever saw or heard of, on or off the stage." And then, after a somewhat troubled pause, he asked, abruptly: "What is it you purpose doing with this—this masquerading genius of yours, Cousin Nelly?"

"Ferret out those missing witnesses," was the prompt response, in her new voice that was a part of her fictitious character, "restore my lover-husband to liberty, and put the infernal, perfidious wretch, whose plotting has ruined him, in his place behind the prison-bars and stone buttresses of the State Prison at Sing Sing!"

Spender at first nodded his approval, and then he shook his head, while the expression of gravity deepened in his face.

"Oh, I'll do it—never fear for me, Cousin Hugh!" exclaimed the brave girl. "Remember, I am no longer a weak, skirt-embarrassed, sex-fettered woman in this guise, which you acknowledge that I carry so bravely, but the great Falcon Detective, with the magic name of Falconbridge at my back. I have promised my husband, Charles Howland, that he shall be a free man, with his good name vindicated before the world, within one month, and I shall keep my word!"

As Spender did not make any immediate reply, she asked, a little impatiently: It is still early in the evening, is it not?"

"Only eight o'clock," he replied, glancing at his watch.

"Come, then. My father will not be home till late. There is still time for you to make me acquainted with that particular wine-room, besides enabling me to fledge my new character in public."

The lawyer rose, but slowly and irresolutely.

"Cousin Nelly," he said, in an expostulatory tone, "have you reflected seriously on this step?"

"I never act without reflection, Cousin Hugh. You ought to know me too well to ask such a question."

"Still, your education, your wealth, your social position—"

"A truce to all that, if you please!" in an altered and somewhat hard tone. "As for my wealth, I possess it in my own right, I believe?"

"True."

"As for my education and social position, they are not superior to Charles Howland's, notwithstanding that he was poor, a mere clerk, an orphan, perhaps the last of his race, and comparatively friendless. Am I right?"

"Yes."

"And, notwithstanding that I might have had richer and gayer suitors, I am not aware that my father made any special objection to Charles Howland paying his addresses to me before this black plot emptied its poison-rain upon his head?"

"Gad! he knew that it would do him precious little good to offer any."

"And you assisted me in my secret marriage to Charles Hammond last night, on the threshold," her voice trembled, "as you might say of the State Prison which has ere this engulfed his purity within its dishonoring maw!"

"Come right along, Nelly!" he hustled out of the room in advance of her. "I have nothing more to say."

"But you may still think—"

"That you are simply noble and as true as steel, to say nothing of your cleverness, and I am with you from first to last. Come along!"

As they passed through the broad deserted hall on their way out, Florine Duprez, the maid, secretly observed them from midway on the stair, smiling approvingly, and perhaps a little enviously, at the brave, nonchalant air with which her young mistress supported her novel character.

A few minutes later, there was a ring at the door-bell, and the footman attended it to admit a visitor, who asked for Miss Sherwood.

The visitor was John Burley.

"My mistress is not at home, Monsieur Burley," said Florine, coming down into the hall.

Both visitor and servant started, for the latter had just vouchsafed the information that he thought the young lady was to be seen.

"Miss Sherwood really went out a short time ago for a visit," the maid went on to explain, with an unchallengeable air of truthfulness, "and she will not be back till late. I alone saw her go."

"This is a disappointment," said Burley, regretfully. "However, I should like to speak a few words with yourself, then, Florine, if agreeable to you."

"Certainly, monsieur; I do not think mademoiselle would object."

She accordingly showed him into the lesser drawing-room, the only one which chanced to be lighted, and closed the door.

The footman, a burly, dark-featured cockney, of an herculean frame and with the conventional calves, named Mopper, who had stood back obsequiously, stood looking at the closed door with lowering indignation for a moment or two.

Then, with the whispered ejaculation, "Well, I'm blowed if that ain't himpidence! and only a lady's maid, too!" he turned and stalked back through the hall with high disgust written over the expression of his back, as Artemus Ward might have said.

He was deeply in love with the blonde Florine himself.

CHAPTER VII.

MISTRESS AND MAID.

FLORINE DUPREZ was too French to be fairly characterized as 'susceptible', and too thoroughly a lady's maid to be otherwise than extremely wide awake.

But she had long before this had an eye for the young West Indian's swarthy good-looks, as distinguished from those on exhibition among her young mistress's visitors, and it is barely necessary to say that her sprightly blonde comeliness, which has already been mentioned as not inconsiderable, was not altogether lost upon Burley, whose ordinarily composed exterior was but the mask for ungovernable passions and a volcanic temperament.

"Florine," said Burley, respectfully, "I am greatly disappointed at not finding Miss Sherwood at home."

"So I have already had the honor of hearing monsieur say," replied Florine, composedly.

He looked at her fixedly, drawing his chair a little closer to hers, when she pushed a little further away, but not quite so far as his advance had been.

"Florine!" in a low, serious and intense voice.

"Yes, monsieur."

"Can you and will you keep a secret—for a consideration?"

She elevated her handsome brows.

"I think so, monsieur. Why not?"

"Perhaps you mean to demand, and justly, what the consideration would be?"

"You do not conjecture badly, monsieur;

though I would also demand what the nature of the secret might be."

The Creole reflected. Despite his calculating disposition, he was singularly prone to think, formulate and act on the impulse of the moment, as was evidenced in the present instance, when, not meeting with Eleanor as he had hoped, he was willing to turn this interview with her maid to his advantage on the spur of a scheme which had at that instant, or when he had proposed to exchange a few words with her, sprung into his brain.

Still, the matter required thought, though he was in the habit of thinking rapidly.

"As to the consideration first," he at last slowly said, still keeping his black eyes upon the young woman, and suggestively turning round and round a diamond ring upon the third finger of his left hand.

"I never accept of trinkets as a consideration," promptly replied Florine, who had perceived that the ring could be of no great value. "I couldn't wear them without attracting mademoiselle's suspicions, and perhaps losing her confidence."

He nodded, and drew from his pocket a purse, whose contents he slowly emptied out into his hand, showing that they consisted of a dozen or more gold-pieces, half and quarter eagles, and then returned them to their old-fashioned, silk-meshed receptacle.

The French maid's eyes sparkled, and her finger-tips seemed to have the itch.

Though honest in the main, and fairly devoted to her mistress, avarice was her weak point.

"Monsieur's temptations improve on acquaintance," she murmured in a faint voice, which she strove to render sarcastic, or coquettish, though not very successfully.

"So much for the consideration—as a beginning," continued the Creole, in his quietly intense, thrilling way. "Now for my secret."

"Yes, monsieur," with assumed indifference.

"Will you keep it?"

She cast down her eyes.

"Yes," so faintly it was hardly audible—"for the consideration," giving the word its French pronunciation.

"Here is my secret, Florine: I love you, but would marry Miss Sherwood for her fortune, and wish to have your secret alliance to assist me to that end."

She started, looking up at him in genuine astonishment.

He had lied, Eleanor herself—even apart from her fortune, though that was not to be despised—being the object of the only genuine, or elevating passion, he had ever known, though the French girl was fair enough in his eyes as a passing amusement.

But then a few lies more or less were nothing in the code of Juan Borleo, otherwise John Burley, and he still kept his ardent gaze fastened upon his companion with a species of mesmeric intensity.

"We could divide and enjoy her fortune between us afterward, you know," he went on, nonchalantly.

"Really, Monsieur Burley," the girl at length found voice to say, "this is an—an altogether startling and unheard-of proposition."

"Florine!" he was bending nearer to her now, his dark face aglow with the verisimilitude of his acting, his black eyes burning yet more passionately; "we are meant for each—for a secret life-partnership—you and I. I am an adventurer, and you are the same, or should be. I am Spanish, you French—I dark, you fair. The passion of the tropics is in our blood, in mine by race, in yours by temperament; the boldness of the old adventurous stock that ripped the blood and gold out of Mexico and Peru is in our spirits and our brains. But, unfortunately, you are poor, and so am I, or with a little bagatelle of a bank account recently received from the division of my mother's estate in Porto Rico upon her death. But with mademoiselle's fortune at our disposal—Body of the Lord! think of it, Florine."

The girl was still more or less terrified, but with her eyes askance upon the purse of gold.

"Monsieur, this is not right," she stammered. "I may be frivolous and vain, but I am not without principle. I—I still don't exactly understand."

"This for your further enlightenment, then!"

He boldly clasped her in his arms, and kissed her repeatedly.

Florine was unaffectedly furious.

To struggle out of his embrace, and send him staggering back under a tremendous box on the ear, was the work of an instant.

"Scoundrel! how dare you! You to call yourself a gentleman, and to aspire to my dear young lady's hand, that you may deceive and rob her."

The Creole could afford to forgive the blow from such a pretty hand.

He smiled, wiped his cheek, kissed the palm of his hand with which he had eased the smart of the blow, and then, coolly reseating himself, tantalizingly jingled the purse of gold before her eyes.

Florine had mastered her anger. She also reseated herself, but with a warning glint in her

gray eyes, and mechanically held out her hand, palm uppermost.

"Come, that is reasonable," said the man. "What will you do for it and that of a kind which may follow, my dear Florine?"

"What does monsieur wish that I should do for him?"

"To be my friend here, and keep me informed of everything with regard to Miss Eleanor's movements, and even her inmost thoughts so far as you can judge them—to advance my interests with her in every way in your power."

"In other words, to be monsieur's secret spy upon mademoiselle?"

"Exactly."

"Well, I do not refuse."

"You agree?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Now we are getting on. Who was that man who departed from this house with the lawyer, Hugh Spender, a few moments before I entered it?"

"One Monsieur Falconbridge, a detective of celebrity, I believe, just home from wanderings abroad."

Burley's brow darkened, and he appeared generally uneasy.

"Just as I feared!" he said, half to himself. "However, did Miss Eleanor see this detective and the lawyer this evening?"

"No; she was gone out on her visit before they came."

"Did they leave word when they would call to see her again?"

"Yes, monsieur, with me," replied the young woman, with cheerful mendacity. "To-morrow evening."

"How does Miss Sherwood take it since her lover's crowning misfortune?"

"Mademoiselle has great fortitude," with a significant smile. "One does not long keep a *forçat*—a convict—in heart and mind. I do not think mademoiselle will depart from the rule."

Burley's eyes flashed with pleasure, but, a step being heard in the hall, he dropped the purse in the girl's hand with an intelligent look.

A moment later Miss Bigbee entered the room, and, as he knew himself to be no favorite with her, he took his departure, after exchanging a few commonplaces with her, and leaving his regrets for Miss Sherwood.

"What could that man have so much to say to you about, my dear?" demanded Miss Jerusha of the maid.

"He was merely telling me how much and extravagantly he loves mademoiselle," replied Florine, sweetly.

CHAPTER VIII.

MISS JERUSA.

AN hour or so later Eleanor returned home. She was about entering her boudoir, accompanied by Florine, when Miss Bigbee, having made the rounds of the secured doors for the night according to her housekeeping custom, perceived her.

Miss Bigbee was a woman's rights champion insensible to fear in the abstract.

Seeing what she supposed to be a man entering her niece's apartments in this highly unbecoming manner, she at once 'went' for him.

"Here, you!" she exclaimed incontinently grasping him by the collar with one hand, and menacingly flourishing her huge bunch of pantry and other keys with the other; "are you a lunatic or a sneak-thief? Florine, you shameless hussy, what is the meaning of this?"

"Let me go, aunt!" cried Nelly, in her own voice, while Florine burst into a fit of laughter. "Don't you know me?"

"Know you?" echoed the spinster, bewilderedly.

"I see you don't quite. Come in here with me then, and I will explain, you dear old Amazon!"

And tearing off her false mustache, Nelly kissed her relative heartily, after which she dragged her into her dressing-room.

There during the process of discarding her disguise, everything was speedily made plain enough.

Miss Jerusha had plumped herself down on the edge of a divan, where she remained sitting stiffly upright, looking over her spectacles with amazed and somewhat scandalized eyes at the revelations as they proceeded, and listening to her niece's verbal explanations and self-exculpations without a word of comment.

"So there you are at last, Aunt Jerusha," said Eleanor at last, when she had slipped on a dressing-go'n, after having deftly rid herself of the last vestige of her disguise with Florine's assistance. "I know all this is shockingly unconventional and improprietary, as one might say, but what do you think of it?"

"I suppose," said Miss Jerusha, still with unbending stiffness, "you imagine you can be of service to poor young Mr. Howland in this way by fishing them missing witnesses"—Miss Jerusha sometimes forgot her grammar in colloquial matters, though never in public speaking at any of the numerous woman's rights associations of which she was a very live member—"out of the obscurity which still cloaks them in its mysterious folds?"

"That is just it, aunt."

"My dear, do you think you can carry it out?"

"Oh, I am sure of it."

"Then come to my arms!"

And, rising impulsively, Aunt Jerusha summarily folded her niece in the embrace of her bony arms with an enthusiasm that only her familiars could have expected of her.

"I knew you would not blame me when you should know all," said Eleanor, kissing her aunt affectionately, and then releasing herself.

"Blame you, my dear?" cried Miss Bigbee, resuming her seat. "You are a heroine! I doubt not that my mantle will fall upon your pretty shoulders when I am gone, and that you will wear it nobly in the chivalrous, undaunted championship of our down-trodden sex against the male monsters who continue our tyrants, as they have been from the first blush of creation's dawn!"

She accompanied herself with gesticulations, and spoke in her best platform voice.

"Well, I'll try to do my best, aunt," replied Eleanor, agreeably, "though I don't particularly object to just one tyrant, if he chances to be to my liking, and to draw his tyranny a little mild."

Miss Bigbee dismissed the qualification with a disdainful gesture, but still looked approvingly upon her beautiful and resolute young relative.

"You're an A1 champion, and no mistake!" she cried. "Let Ezra Sherwood growl and grunt, and fret and fume, after the manner of his brutal and despotic sex, as he may, I'll stand by you, my love, while I have a dress-waist to my back, or till my tongue cleaves to the roof of my mouth!"

"Oh, but papa must know nothing of this, aunt!" cried Nelly hastily. "Don't forget that. This entire affair must remain an absolute secret among us three and Cousin Hugh Spender. You will remember that now, won't you, dear?"

Miss Jerusha nodded reflectively.

"So be it," she said. "What is man but a monster? and shall we halt in our far-sweeping career in the direction of independence, the suffrage and the light at his arrogant and supercilious command? Perish the thought!"

"Yes, indeed, aunt. Kiss me good-night, now, and remember that I have trustingly confided my secret to you."

"Man, by whatever proud and resounding title he may clothe his puny and inferior personality with," continued Miss Jerusha, rising in her most stately and dignified way, "is a swindle and a fraud! Good-night, my dear."

And, kissing her niece, with a lofty nod at parting for Florine, the avenger of her sex's time-gray wrongs, jingled her bunch of keys defiantly, and strode off to her well-earned repose.

Eleanor threw herself upon the divan a little warily.

"Now, my dear Florine," she said, "as to the visit of that person, Mr. John Burley."

"He was awfully disappointed at not seeing mademoiselle," replied the maid, forthwith beginning to arrange her young mistress's hair for the night, "and talked with me quite a little while in the lesser drawing-room."

"What did he say?"

"Very much, and yet but one thing. He did nothing but rave to me of his love for you, while bewailing how you must continue to misjudge him, as he said."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; he was all broke up, as they say."

"He will come again, of course?"

"Yes, and doubtless at the earliest moment, though he did not tell me when."

"What was the chief substance of this—gentleman's talk with you, Florine?"

"There really wasn't any, ma'mselle. Or, if there was, it was only in his desire to know how you were affected by Monsieur Howland's *chute*."

"How did you answer him?"

"In the way that I thought ma'mselle would most approve," replied Florine, hesitatingly.

"How was that? Don't be afraid to tell me the exact truth, Florine."

"Oh, no, ma'mselle—as if I could do otherwise, and ma'mselle always so good and kind to me!"

"What did you tell him?"

"You know, ma'mselle, I thought it best to delude the wretch a little."

"But how did you do it?"

"I said that you bore yourself with uncommon fortitude. I remember almost my exact words to monsieur, the little villain. 'One does not long keep a *forçat*—a convict—in heart and mind,' I said, 'and I have no reason to suppose that mademoiselle will prove an exception to the rule.'"

"So!" after a moment's thoughtfulness, in which Nelly's brow clouded, only to clear again; "and how did he seem to relish the species of falsehood, my dear?"

"He was overjoyed for the moment, ma'mselle. The little monsieur's black eyes fairly snapped with pleasure for the moment."

"Altogether, I am not sorry for the deception you practiced, Florine," said Nelly, after another pause.

"You make me happy by saying so, mademoiselle."

"It is a deception," continued Eleanor, more as if speaking to herself than otherwise, "that I shall force myself to keep up. In accordance with my father's wish, I shall endeavor to be quite *complaisant* to Mr. John Burley—until I am ready to mete out his deserts to him."

"If you will allow me, ma'mselle," interposed Florine, demurely, "I think him a very untrustworthy gentleman."

"Untrustworthy!" Eleanor's dark eyes flashed. "However, never mind. He did not, I hope, make any attempt upon your fidelity or devotion to me?"

"Oh, madam!"

"Well, he is capable of it. Did he, though?"

"By no means, ma'mselle!" indignantly. "I scarcely think he would have *dared!*" And Florine's white hand clinched so pronouncedly as almost to snap in twain the ivory comb with which she was giving the finishing touches to her mistress's hair.

"That will do then, Florine," said Nelly. "I think I have reason to trust implicitly in you."

And she gave her maid a good-night kiss, as was her custom when especially pleased with her, and the latter cheerfully betook herself to her own room with John Burley's purse of gold in her pocket.

Eleanor, who was very religious, knelt at her prayers, which were, as altogether of late, devoted almost exclusively to the welfare of her lover-husband in adversity, and was then speedily in the land of dreams, wherein she was pursuing phantom wine-room waiters through the greater part of the night.

CHAPTER IX.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

"JOHN BURLEY told me yesterday that he would call on you last night, Nelly," observed Colonel Sherwood, at breakfast next morning.

"Did he come?"

"Yes, papa, but I was out."

"Sorry for that."

"Florine received him in my place."

"A maid to receive a young lady's visitor! I am surprised."

"I am not, papa," indifferently, "since you might have taken the trouble to come home to dinner and apprise me of the high honor of Mr. John Burley's intentions. I have promised to receive the man more complaisantly, and I shall do so—but never anything more." With quiet decision.

Colonel Sherwood—he had never been a colonel except by courtesy, by the way, having passed much of his earlier manhood in Mississippi, though a Northerner by birth—moved a little uneasily as he pushed back his chair and lighted his cigar.

He had early recognized and tacitly succumbed to his daughter's moral strength, as opposed to his own weakness, apart from the fact of her being independently rich in her own right, though there were times when he partly rebelled at the latitude she had unconsciously come to take for herself, though it was never for long.

"That is well," said he, a little irritably, "and I really must try to think less of my club and more of my home, I suppose."

"Ezra Sherwood," rather severely observed Miss Bigbee, who, being a great tea-drinker, was abstractedly toying with her fourth morning cup, "you'll never do it. Once the slaves to a pernicious habit, besides being natural monsters—and the self-styled lords of creation, ha, ha, ha!" with hysterical sarcasm—"never reform."

"Of course," with a grim smile, "and how about the women in a similar thrall? Miss Jerusha?"

"They never are the willing slaves to a pernicious habit, sir—never!"

"Indeed," blandly. "Well, I have just read here in this newspaper of a wealthy widow, with dutiful children, a splendid home, and everything her heart should desire, being picked up in the street in a beastly state of intoxication."

"Hal Go on—snap your plantation whip—'tis only womanhood that squirms!"

"I believe I shall. Your skin, Jerusha, is getting yellower and more leathery-looking every day of your life."

"Ezra Sherwood!"

"Yes, yes; tea-drinking to excess, and a disordered liver in consequence!" delightedly. "And yet you keep on swilling the stuff as if it were Pommery Sec. But, of course, women are never the slaves to a pernicious habit. Oh, Lord!"

"Ezra Sherwood, I said *willing slaves!*" exclaimed Miss Bigbee, with her loftiest elocutionary scorn.

"Oh!"

"Yes, sir; and if you had suffered me to finish my sentence, instead of going off half-cocked—I repeat the accusation, sir, *half-cocked*, after the brutal, brow-beating, bullying and swashbuckler fashion customary with your autocratic, sultanic sex, sir (lords of creation—

ha, ha)—you would have heard me qualify my declaration—with becoming meekness, I hope—ha, ha!—by adding that they were never even willing slaves to a pernicious habit, unless lashed, goaded and hounded thereto by man's inhumanity—to—to woman!"

And here Miss Bigbee vouchsafed to subside a little, with an air of conscious championship and victory that sat upon her gaunt and angular personality like a laurel wreath upon a bean-pole.

"I give in!" said Colonel Sherwood, softly puffing his cigar with a distinct air of submission. "And you could have spared me the latter part of your exordium, Jerusha. 'Sultanic sex' would alone have knocked me out."

"Papa," interposed Eleanor, who had long ceased to be amused by these passages-at-arms, with which she had been familiar from her earliest recollections, "isn't Mr. Burley a Cuban, or something of the sort?"

"A Porto Rican," was the reply, "and his true name is Juan Borleo, which he has Anglicized into John Burley."

"Why should he change his name?"

"He hasn't exactly, but only Americanized it. Naturally enough, too, when you come to think of his having taken out his naturalization papers, and his praiseworthy desire to become a thorough American."

"Oh!"

"That's the way of it, my dear." And Colonel Sherwood, who was too polite to give his cigar more than the initial puff or two at table when the ladies were present, rose to betake himself down-town.

As he always drank sparingly even at his club, and had won a couple of hundred at whist the preceding evening, he was, moreover, on fairly good terms with himself.

"And hasn't he been somewhat of a—wanderer?" continued Eleanor, just skipping the word "adventurer" in time.

"I believe so. Traveled pretty much all over the world, I am told, and doubtless in many employments. An invaluable and versatile young man of high principle, I do believe. Something of a sailor, too, for he hinted of a desire to sail my yacht, the *Fearnaught*, for a short trip a few days ago. I may give him the chance for a vacation, as I have no notion of sailing her myself this year. But look here, Nelly," in a pleased tone, "this is a decidedly novel interest in young Burley on your part."

"I shall not cease," quietly replied the young woman, in an equivocal tone that was altogether lost upon her father, "to take the utmost interest in Mr. John Burley, otherwise Mr. Juan Borleo, and his doings hereafter."

"Glad of that," observed Colonel Sherwood, going, "for I have determined to bring him home with me to dinner this evening."

The foregoing had been overheard by Florine, who was busying herself among the flower-pots in the window, and she remarked the disgusted look that came into Eleanor's face at the last announcement.

"Humph!" sniffed Miss Bigbee, at last fairly filled with her favorite beverage. "Must we have that black little hypocrite to dinner?"

"My dear aunt," said Eleanor, quietly, "we can't always order things as we would in this kaleidoscope of a world."

She told her aunt that she would take lunch somewhere down-town, and then, somewhat later on, called Florine into her dressing-room.

"My dear," said she, "you shall have the honor of lunching with the great detective, Major Falconbridge, *pro tem.*, at a down-town wine-room and restaurant this day noon."

"Yes, ma'mselle," replied the maid, in something of a flutter, "and do ladies go there?"

"Oh, yes, quite frequently in the daytime. Hugh Spender told me so, and from my brief preparatory observation of last night, it looked as if it might be a very attractive place, with capital fare. So pray assist me into my detective character without delay, and then you will have to make yourself as pretty and stylish as possible."

Florine obeyed with her usual serviceableness, and while thus engaged, asked:

"Might I venture upon a question or two, mademoiselle?"

"What a request! Any number of them, you little goose!"

"Mademoiselle cannot think of taking all the servants into her confidence?"

"Of course not! What an idea!"

"It is less of an idea than an apprehension, ma'mselle. For do you not see the risk you will run of detection, or at least a challenge, from one or another of them, in thus disporting your disguise by day—passing in or out of the house, I mean?"

"I have thought of that, Florine. There is nothing for it but to accept the risk, and, at the same time practice the utmost caution, in which I must rely greatly on your co-operation."

"Ah, yes! One thing more, dear ma'mselle!"

"What is it, my dear?"

"Of course it will become known, sooner or later, that Monsieur Falconbridge, the famous detective, is once more home from abroad, and

a visitor here, at your instance, in the interests of poor Monsieur Howland?"

"Very likely. I don't see how that can be helped."

"Yes, ma'mselle. And should the celebrated man be recognized on the streets, for instance—by some one or another of ma'mselle's acquaintances to whom this fact shall have become known—as ma'mselle's maid's escort, instead of her own?"

"Ah! as to-day in the prospective, for instance?"

"Yes, ma'mselle."

"A difficulty that had not occurred to me before, and one well worth considering. Well, all I can say is that we must take our chances. Now that I am all right, Florine, you may devote yourself to your own toilet with as much expedition as you can put into practice. Were I not a man I would willingly assist you, as a return for the offices you have just rendered me."

"Oh, mademoiselle!"

And Florine hurried off to her own room, while Eleanor, once more thoroughly in character, put some finishing touches upon her make-up.

The wine-room and restaurant, which it is needless to particularize by name, was a fashionable one in the neighborhood of Broadway and Fourteenth—which may appropriately be characterized as a down-town locality in the vast, rapidly northward-spreading New York of the present day—and Eleanor had not erred in deeming it to be much frequented by lady customers, especially throughout the shopping hours.

When she and Florine entered the restaurant, or eating-house side of the establishment toward one o'clock, the tables were nearly all filled, chiefly with well-dressed women, some of whom were accompanied by children, for the most part young misses of different ages, while nearly all were more or less associated with various packages and bundles.

"Be sure and keep your eyes about you, especially with regard to the waiters," whispered the pseudo-detective to his companion, as he guided her to the only vacant table that was in sight.

Florine was looking very pretty and stylish in a light-blue summer suit, with hat to match, which became her sprightly blonde comeliness to perfection.

A waiter appearing, the "detective" said:

"We should like to have compartment Number 7 of the wine-room to ourselves," accompanying the demand with a liberal fee.

The man regarded the donor with perceptibly increased respect, at the same time looking at "him" attentively.

"At once, sir," he replied. "I will see if the cabinet is disengaged." And he disappeared through an arched opening communicating with the wine-room.

CHAPTER X.

A DISCOVERY.

The waiter quickly returned to say that the desired compartment had just been vacated by a lady and gentleman and to conduct them to it.

They were soon installed therein over a delicate lunch and some choice claret.

"Is this *the* compartment, ma'm'zelle?" inquired Florine, who was familiar with the chief features of Charles Howland's trial and conviction.

"Yes," replied the other, a little severely, while helping out the salad and wine; "but you will please to address me as 'monsieur' or the 'major.'"

"Ah, pardon, monsieur! I had forgotten. And they are not over-cleanly in your American *cafes*, major. *Ciel!* look at the dust collected under the edges of this carpet; and I do not think that mirror has been rubbed up for a month."

"It is not the *very* best of our New York *cafes*, my dear; don't forget that."

While they were leisurely proceeding with their lunch, they more than once detected a face, presumably that of a waiter, and not always the same one, at that, peeping curiously at them over one or another of the compartment's comparatively low partition walls.

This was the more noticeable, inasmuch as, judging by the hum of voices and knife-and-fork clatter to be heard, the adjacent cabinets were doubtless also occupied by lunchers, of both sexes, so that, barring Florine's exceptional good looks, there seemed no special occasion for the espionage or curiosity manifested, whichever it might be.

"I must see about this," said the detective presently, when the annoyance had been several times repeated. "Excuse me a few moments, my dear Florine."

And quietly quitting the cabinet, "he" forthwith proceeded to the cashier's desk for an explanation.

"He" quickly returned, with an amused expression.

"It was merely curiosity," he explained. "And what do you think it all meant?"

"I really can't imagine, monsieur," was Florine's response.

Falconbridge's Double burst into his dry little laugh.

"I am more famous than I had any idea of," he said. "That first waiter—you remarked how attentively he eyed me?—recognized me as the great Falconbridge, newly returned from my long absence in the Orient, and the news has run through the establishment like wild-fire. Even the cashier, who is one of the proprietors, could not refrain from congratulating me on my return, and begged the honor of taking me by the hand."

Florine burst into her gay laugh.

"Such are the penalties of greatness, my dear," meditatively observed the Double, sipping his wine. "Of course, they will all guess that I am—trailing down those missing witnesses, and I scarcely know whether it will be to my detriment or advantage."

"Let us hope the latter, monsieur," was Florine's cheering advice. "If they are so honored by your distinguished presence, they may feel yet more so in facilitating your quest."

"If it is really in their power to do so, which I am not certain of. However, we must get at the employees in some way. The chief cook ought to be a good one to make a start with."

They ordered more wine, while making a mere pretext of consuming what was before them (the cupidors were convenient for that purpose), in order to have an excuse for lingering long in the compartment, and "Falconbridge's" complaint had had the effect of abating the peeping annoyance.

At last, when it was evident that the neighboring cabinets were comparatively deserted, Florine suddenly arose with an exclamation.

"See, monsieur!" she whispered, pointing to a particularly dusty corner of the compartment near her seat. "A find!"

With that she made a little half-dive, and produced from its chance hiding-place, partly under the edge of the carpet, a small object covered with dust.

"What can it be?" she asked, examining the object. "Ah, a pencil-case, and gold-mounted, too."

The pseudo-detective was leaning forward, with starting eyes, "his" dark face expressive of the liveliest interest and satisfaction.

"Give it me!" he exclaimed, in a low but excited voice. "Ah!" taking it into his hand, "better than a pencil-case. Florine, this is a treasure—our first clew in the proof of Charles Howland's innocence and his false friend's infamy!"

"Bless me! what is the article, monsieur?"

"A fountain pen!"

Florine was quick of apprehension, and, as has already been observed, the details of Howland's trial and conviction were familiar to her.

"Heavens!" she exclaimed; "and this the very cabinet in which poor Monsieur Howland declared so positively that Monsieur Burley wrote out for him the check, whose alleged forgery caused his conviction?"

"Exactly; and with a new fountain pen, while Burley swore that he had never had such an instrument in his possession. Behold the silent witness to his accused perjury!"

"This is truly startling, monsieur! But might it not be another pen wholly disassociated with that lamentable affair?"

"There are ways of making sure on that point," and "Falconbridge" carefully secured the "find."

A little later, he said:

"Prepare yourself to interview the *chef*, Florine."

He then summoned the proprietor by one of the waiters, and when the former appeared, he said:

"Mr. G—, your *chef* is doubtless a Frenchman?"

"Certainly, Mr. Falconbridge," was the affable response; "or an Alsatian, which is much the same thing."

"Ah! Well, my little friend here, Mademoiselle Duprez, who is also French, is quite anxious to solve the enigma of that particularly excellent chicken salad of which we have partaken. I wonder if your *chef* would be so obliging as to impart its secret to her."

"Of course, he will," promptly replied Mr. G—. "Shall I bring him hither, or would the young lady prefer to accompany me to Monsieur Gouter's cabinet?"

CHAPTER XI.

A RECONTRE.

"I THINK I would prefer to meet the *chef* in his department, monsieur," Florine answered for herself, with the most dazzling smile. "I have never even glanced into the *cuisine* of a great *cafe*, and imagine that it must be very interesting."

The *restaurateur* was even more eager to oblige her now, and she forthwith accompanied him.

She was gone so long that her companion grew momentily more hopeful of what she might succeed in achieving, and "he" passed the interval of waiting in chat with the proprietor-cashier, who had speedily returned to his post

Old Falcon's Double.

after introducing Florine to the *chef* in the latter's own domain.

"By the way, major," Mr. G—— made bold to observe at last, "I presume your initial home business, after your long absence abroad, must be to look up those vanished waiters of ours, who were so sadly wanted as witnesses in the Howland forgery case?"

"What makes you think so?" asked the detective's Double, who was trying to dispose of a newly-lighted cigar, by making believe to smoke or otherwise demolish it, little by little, without making himself sick.

"Well," with a knowing smile, "Mr. Spender the lawyer made many unsuccessful inquiries here with regard to them, you know, and I am pretty certain that Miss Sherwood (Gad! with what pluck she stuck to the poor young fellow up to the very moment of his conviction, eh?) was eager to spend any amount of money to the same end."

"So I have heard; but the city is full of detectives, good, bad and indifferent. Why did they not secure the services of some of them?"

"Why, they did, as a matter of course, and we got tired enough, I can tell you, giving the same non-informative replies to their stupid questions over and over again. But to what end? The detective they were after was not to be secured for love or money, though at present on hand."

"Thanks! I don't mind admitting that I am somewhat interested in the case."

Mr. G—— looked at "him" keenly.

"You know the missing witnesses' names, as a matter of course?"

"Yes; Peter Kelly and John Kennedy."

"Correct. I think I can give you something of a pointer toward discovering the whereabouts of one of them."

"I shall thank you kindly for it, Mr. G——."

Kennedy had an aunt, I am but recently informed, who kept a saloon, or low drinking shanty, somewhere in the vicinity of Eagle Rock in the Orange Mountains, over in Jersey."

"Come, that is perhaps worth knowing, and I am acquainted with the locality, perhaps. What is the woman's name?"

"Also Kennedy, I am told—the Widow Kennedy. John occasionally visited her, it is said."

"A drinking shanty?"

"Yes; probably one of those itinerant conveniences that follow up gangs of railroad, tunnel or other laborers for the purpose of fleecing and poisoning them with rot-gut at the same time."

"I'll look into this, Mr. G——. Thank you kindly for the hint."

"Don't mention it. Only too glad to serve you, I am sure. However, the woman may have moved away, or be dead of her own whisky, by this time."

"Still the hint may be worth following up. By the way, let me retain it exclusively, will you?"

"With all my heart! Though it isn't likely any one else would apply for it at this late day."

"There is that man Burley."

"Ah! who secured Howland's conviction?"

"The same."

"He still comes here occasionally, though no longer with a pretended eagerness to discover the missing men's whereabouts."

"But you will keep this to yourself, should he manifest any further curiosity?"

"To be sure. Glad to oblige you, though with such a trifling."

"Thank you again. I see Mademoiselle Duprez returning at last. She ought to have mastered, or mistress, the cooking mysteries of your entire establishment by this time. Suppose you send us in another bottle of that superb claret of yours before we take our departure."

This was done as "Falconbridge" hastened to rejoin his fair companion in No. 7.

"Well?" he demanded as soon as they were alone.

Florine was somewhat flushed, probably from the heat of the region she had been exploring.

"Ah, monsieur," she replied, gayly, "what a place I have been investigating!"

"No doubt!"

"Monsieur Gouter showed me everywhere; and the mystery of that delectable salad is no longer a mystery to me."

"You must be happy over that."

"Overjoyed! And the *chef*'s office! Why, it is a regular little counting-house, and he only orders and directs like an autocrat. I don't believe he ever touches pot, kettle, pan or dish."

"These *chefs* are great personages, no doubt."

"I should say so! This one is a heavy *brune* and very agreeable."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, monsieur. And how pleased he was that I could chat with him in the true Parisian French, though to the exposure of many of his provincialisms. An Alsatian, you know."

"The deuce! and what of that?"

"But I believe he is more than half in love with me already."

"You will not forget my prior claims, I trust, Florine?"

"Oh, no!"

"Anything else?"

She burst into a laugh at her companion's growing impatience.

"Yes; that!" And she threw a letter before him.

The detective's Double seized it with avidity.

"What is this?" he exclaimed, in a yet more guarded voice than had yet been used.

"A scrap of information worth having," was the now serious reply, in the same tone.

"How did you get it?"

"I stole it from among a number of papers on the *chef*'s desk as a matter of course."

"Stole it!"

But the pretended detective's repugnance was mitigated, inasmuch as the broken envelope bore a date five or six days old. The superscription was in a painfully scrawling hand, scarcely legible, and he dismissed his scruples in deciphering the contents, which were as follows:

"ARMONK, WESTCHESTER Co., N. Y.

"DEAR MISTER GOOTER:—

"Kepe this a secret thow I do hop Mister G—— is keping my plase for me. This is a mene hole, and I shal only remane in it as long as Mister Burley kontines to pay me well for dooing it. Ime bar-tender in a kuntry gin mill, and the bere aint no better than dishwatter. Imagine my feelings.

"Yours truly,

"P. KELLY."

"Falconbridge" examined the date on the envelope once more, and then, with a frown, put the letter in his pocket.

"Six days old!" he exclaimed, in an agony of indignation. "This *chef* is an infernal and heartless scoundrel!"

"Why so, monsieur?"

"You have deciphered this scrawl?"

"Yes."

"Do you not see that a revelation of the man's whereabouts, at the time it was received, might have rescued Charles Howland from that accursed conviction?"

Florine turned a little pale.

"Ah, I do now!" she murmured.

"Come, let us go." The detective's Double was once more calm.

It was now the middle of the afternoon.

On their way out of the restaurant entrance a man, who had perhaps been lingering outside for the purpose, suddenly confronted them, with an angrily curious glance directed at "Falconbridge's" companion.

Florine was not a little startled, for all her habitual address, for the man was John Burley.

The latter might have accosted her, but that he was anticipated by the "detective," who promptly tapped him on the shoulder, with a stern glance that was a very fair substitute for the falcon gaze of his celebrated prototype.

"Your name is Burley, I believe?"

"I never deny my name."

"Mine's Falconbridge, of which you have perhaps heard before?"

"What if I have?" impudently, and yet with an air of being ill at ease.

"Just this; that your manner of looking at this young lady, at present under my protection, is highly displeasing to me. If you should follow us it will be at your peril."

Burley, who was by no means wanting in courage, though naturally somewhat abashed by the words and name of the Falcon Detective, with whose reputation he was familiar, might have ventured upon yet another retort, but that he was rudely thrust aside by a strength of arm that slightly staggered him.

Then the pseudo-Falconbridge signaled a down-bound Broadway car, and coolly got into it with his companion.

"Look back," he whispered, when they were seated, "and see if he is venturing to follow us."

"Quite the contrary, monsieur. He is walking rapidly up the street, as if he were very angry."

"Ah!" easily; "it will do him no harm, and we are all right now."

CHAPTER XII.

A CLEW STRENGTHENED.

"MIGHT I ask whither we are going now, monsieur?" asked Florine, after a pause.

"Certainly, my dear. To the manufacturer's, whose trade-mark is on the fountain pen."

"Ah, I begin to comprehend." And the young woman gazed at her companion with unqualified admiration.

The car chanced to have no other occupants at the moment, it being a down trip, and already past the middle of the afternoon, when the tide of traffic sets northward or homeward from lower New York, unless to cross one or another of the rivers into Brooklyn or New Jersey.

"Oh, monsieur!" Florine exclaimed, in a low, earnest voice, "how I wish you really were a man!"

Her companion laughed.

"Why?"

"You are not only so clever, but you are bold and brave. I would love you with my whole heart!"

"It's a pity I can't be what I seem, then. There is many a man who would barter his all for your sprightly smiles, my dear, and I more than suspect that scoundrel, John Burley, to be one of them."

"Peste! that black-eyed little mesmerizer! I

could fear, but never love, such a one. Moreover, his heart, or what does duty for that organ in his composition, is wholly and truly given to one Mademoiselle Eleanor. I know it."

"Do you? Well, Mademoiselle Eleanor could dispense with the offering, besides cheerfully trampling it under her feet."

Florine Duprez was altogether sincere in the declaration she had made.

Though having accepted the Creole's gold, and perfectly willing to accept more, besides possessing little or no principle, she hadn't the slightest idea, at least as yet—of giving up her mistress's secrets as an equivalent, however gayly she might be willing for the plotter to imagine the contrary.

Alighting near Broadway and Wall street, the pretended detective led the way into a little upstairs work-shop and salesroom combined, whose external sign was an exaggerated gold pen, suspended, point downward, between two windows at the front, with an inconspicuous associative legend in gilt letters.

The proprietor, a crusty-looking little Englishman, was alone as the visitors entered.

"You are the maker of this fountain pen, I believe, sir?" queried the "detective," exhibiting the article, after the exchange of a few commonplaces, in which he had been careful to be very polite, not to say ingratiating.

"Yes, and doubtless its seller, too," was the response, after a mere glance at the pen. "Few others but myself dispose, at first hand, of the pens I manufacture."

"Could you inform me, possibly, when you disposed of this one, and to whom?"

"Hardly." The man looked at him surprisedly. "Who are you, to ask such an odd question, sir?"

"A detective of some repute, Falconbridge by name."

"Humph! never heard of you before. Yes; come to think it over, I believe I have. Let me look at the pen," taking it, and examining its inscription through his glasses. "You see, I sell so many pens, even fountain pens, without making any registry of their number or purchasers—Wait! I have, oddly enough, a perfect recollection of this one, which is numbered eight thousand two hundred and forty."

"You have?"

"Certainly; I sold it late in the afternoon of May, several weeks ago, to Mr. Burley, one of Colonel Sherwood's clerks, who had bought pens of another sort of me before."

Neither "Falconbridge" nor his fair companion could scarcely contain their joy at these words.

"Allow me to ask, sir," continued the former, "how the date and circumstance happen to be so firmly fixed in your memory."

"I've no objection. I had just received word of the death of my only brother, and was about to shut up shop, in order to visit his widow in Brooklyn without delay, when Mr. Burley came hurrying in to make the purchase. I obliged him by uncovering my show-case again, glanced at the number of the pen selected, as I invariably do from habit, and somehow this number has stuck in my memory every since."

The date mentioned was the same on which Howland had declared that Burley wrote and gave him the incriminating check, late in the afternoon, in compartment No. 7 of the wine-room.

"Would you swear to this in a court of law, on occasion, sir?"

"Of course, I would, if required to do so, though I don't particularly admire courts of law. What's up, my friend?"

"Nothing that can possibly cause you personal annoyance. I hope you will excuse an explanation at present."

"Oh, just as you please. It's nothing to me, one way or another." And, handing back the pen, the old fellow resumed a piece of delicate artisan work in which he had been interrupted.

The "detective" obtained his business card, and then said, suavely: "One more question of a less serious nature, if you will permit it, friend?"

"Oh, fire away!" scarcely looking up from his work.

"Do you read the newspapers?"

"American newspapers, never!" crabbedly. "They once libeled my poor brother Jem in a mining suit, and wouldn't give him a particle of satisfaction when he applied for it, the devil fly away with their lying sheets, and smash their dirty presses! Since then, the good old English or Canadian bulletins have been good enough for me."

"Accept my sincere thanks for your frankness, sir!"

And the disguised Eleanor forthwith took her departure with her companion.

"My dear Florine, we are in wonderful luck!" she exclaimed, as they were making their way to the west side Elevated Railway. "Good heavens! I think we could almost make a case against Burley as we stand, though of course we must bag those missing witnesses, to make assurance doubly sure."

"Monsieur Mademoiselle," replied Florine, with mock gravity, "I am very glad to know all this."

Old Falcon's Double.

Had there been time, Eleanor would have made an effort to carry the news of her encouraging success to Hugh Spender's office, but the afternoon was waxing late, and moreover, there was no certainty of finding him there.

She therefore hurried homeward, and with the assistance of Florine's shrewdness, managed to re-enter the house, and gain her apartments without attracting observation from within or without.

At dinner that evening, Eleanor, though somewhat *distracte*, was exquisitely dressed, and looking her loveliest.

While not altogether lively, she managed to impart sufficient agreeableness into her treatment of John Burley, as her father's guest—playing and singing his favorite airs for him, besides conversing with amiable good-nature—as to encourage him not a little, while also contributing to Colonel Sherwood's satisfaction, though the former found difficulty in reconciling his hope of her having whistled the wretched Howland down the wind with the fact of her association with the Falcon Detective (as he thought), whom he bitterly cursed in his secret heart, and, given the opportunity, would have assassinated with an enthusiasm worthy of a better cause.

"May I come again, Miss Sherwood?"

He was making his good-night acknowledgments at last, and she even managed to restrain a shudder while permitting him to take her hand.

"Why, what is to prevent you, Mr. Burley?" with an elevation of her delicately-penciled brows.

"I mean," with a burning look of his tropical eyes, "might I come again—to see you exclusively—with—with the chance of making myself interesting?"

"Yes!" decidedly, and with a peculiar smile; "I shall always have an interest in you, Mr. Burley—of one sort or another."

The equivocation was lost upon him.

Before she could guess his intention, he had raised her hand to his lips, kissed it passionately, and was gone.

"Aha, Nelly!" was Colonel Sherwood's comment, after witnessing the act; "progress, progress! We may soon be on with a new love, when off with the old and unworthy one, eh?"

Eleanor made some inarticulate reply in a choking voice, her frame quivering with suppressed anger, the back of her hand where the man's lips had pressed it feeling as if it had been stung by a serpent.

"By the way, my dear," continued her father, at the foot of the stair, "I shall want to have a little talk with you in the morning. And I believe I'll try a new sensation now by going to bed at ten o'clock."

"Aren't you afraid it will be too much for you, Ezra Sherwood?" sarcastically observed Miss Bigbee, coming into the hall as he was passing up the stairs. "You ate your dinner in your own home this same evening, instead of at your club, you must remember—sensation enough in all conscience for a masculine brain, one would imagine! Ha!"

"Ta ta, Jerusha, my dear!" pleasantly from above. "Don't forget your gallon night-cap of tea, and then pleasant dreams of the lover-despot who has been so long in putting in an appearance."

Eleanor scarcely heard them.

A moment or two later she was prostrate, face downward, in the solitude of her chamber, her brain awhirl, her heart nigh to bursting with its bitter anguish.

"My God! can I carry it out?" she sobbed. "Oh, Charley, my love, my life! it is all for you, for you! But which suffers the most, you in the ignominy of your prison cell, or I in this whirl of duplicity, repugnance, heart-weariness and shame?"

CHAPTER XIII.

OPPORTUNITIES.

As for John Burley, instead of returning directly to his lodgings from his employer's house, he quietly took his station under the fringing trees of Mount Morris Park, opposite, and remained on watch.

He had seen Eleanor dispatching her maid upon an errand a few minutes prior to his own departure, and was determined to force some sort of an explanation with her.

It was a Saturday night, and, notwithstanding it was after ten o'clock, all Harlem was very lively, with the business avenues and many of the cross streets still crowded, though the immediate vicinity of the romantic little park was comparatively quiet, with but a few stray couples to be seen now and again strolling amid the deeply-shaded walks.

At last he saw Florine, and, luckily, she was coming along the park side of the street—perhaps with a mischievous desire of surprising or spying out a flirtation or two.

Burley addressed her, and she came to a smiling pause with her accustomed self-possession.

"You, monsieur?"

"And no one else, belle Florine," replied Burley, with forced amiability. "I have been waiting for you."

"Monsieur might employ his time better."

"Monsieur takes the liberty of judging for himself as to that."

"It is well to have an independent spirit."

"What was your errand, Florine?"

"To the district telegraph station for mademoiselle," with assumed reluctance.

"I presume you give me the right to question?"

"Monsieur has paid for the privilege, at all events."

"What was your errand to the telegraph station, then?"

"To telegraph Monsieur Spender," promptly, "that mademoiselle must see him to-morrow morning, without fail."

"So!" he frowned. "You were with that detective to-day?"

"What of it?"

"Florine, you owe me an explanation, as to that."

"Do I, monsieur? Well, I always pay my debts."

"Proceed, if you please. I am an impatient creditor just now."

"Mademoiselle, of course, couldn't accompany the detective to the wine-room herself. She sent me in her place."

"For what purpose?"

"To assist, if possible, in discovering something of those missing employees."

"What did you discover?"

"Nothing."

"Nor the detective, either?"

"Neither he. For my part, I doubt if their discovery would amount to anything, anyway."

"Of course, it wouldn't!" Then, after a frowning pause: "Florine, you gave me encouragement to suppose that Miss Sherwood was ceasing to care for Howland, the convict."

"It was the truth," mendaciously.

"Why should she still concern herself, then, in the effort to prove him innocent?"

"Out of respect for whom tender associations. She can wish the young man freed, without dreaming of marrying him—a convict—can't she?"

"Not very consistently. I don't see how she can."

"Mademoiselle has a very tender heart."

"I should say so. What further appointments has she with Falconbridge?"

"I do not know. *Mon Dieu*, monsieur! do you imagine that mademoiselle makes me her *alter ego*?"

After some further questioning in the same strain, and with a like result, Burley's manner changed to one of admiration for his companion.

"Come into the Park here with me, Florine," he said at last. "There is one other thing I would say to you."

"Why not say it here?"

"There are occasional passers. In there we shall be less likely to be observed."

She complied with assumed reluctance, which became real a moment later, so mesmerically did his black eyes fasten their burning gaze upon her from among the deeper shadows.

"Have you thought of my proposition to yourself, Florine?" he softly asked.

"Yes; but it will not do."

"Not when I love you?" He had taken one of her hands, holding it so strongly that she could not withdraw it.

"You would deceive me, monsieur. It is mademoiselle you love."

"No; only her fortune—which you and I are to spend for her when you shall have helped me to it."

"I can't believe you sincere in this, monsieur."

He suddenly released her hand to produce a dagger, with which he slightly menaced her.

Terrified, she would have fled but that he held her by a species of magnetism, potent, but not less terrifying in itself.

"Listen, Florine!" he exclaimed, savagely. It was mere acting, but he was determined to secure the girl's secret alliance in his plot for Eleanor's fortune by fair means or foul. "My passion for you is so genuine, so overwhelming, that, did I deem it possible you should ever love another man, I would plunge this poniard in your heart. Now do you believe me?"

"Alas!" faintly; "but how could you marry both mademoiselle and myself?"

"Of course, I can't. My promise to you is a conditional one. After you shall have assisted me in securing her, it shall be up stakes and away with me and her money? How long will it then take for her to secure a divorce from me? After that, you shall rejoin me in a far, fair, foreign land. You shall be my bride—my second, but true and only bride; we shall be rich and joyous, without a care; and the world shall pass as in a dream of golden hours."

"Oh, but this is so *bizarre*, so very wild, my friend."

"Do you promise?" Another slight menace with the knife.

"Yes."

"Remember, then, from this time forth you are absolutely devoted to my interests."

"Yes, monsieur."

With a lightning-like movement he put up the weapon, and attempted to embrace her.

But his spell was somehow snapped, and, turn-

ing, she fled like a deer, resting not until she was safe within doors.

Burley gave a low, chuckling laugh as he strode away.

"The vain little fool!" he muttered. "Let me but keep her true till the queenly Eleanor is mine, after which I shall enjoy a laugh and jest at her expense."

But the wily Florine Duprez was more of an enigma than this hot-blooded plotter (or was he already but a bungler?) gave her credit for being; for all that, she reported the success of her errand to the district telegraph station to her young mistress, without saying a word of her interview with him.

"Shall you attend to your Sunday-school class to-day, my dear?" Colonel Sherwood asked of his daughter at breakfast next morning.

"No, papa," she replied. "It is now the vacation.

"Well, I shall go down the Sound in the Fearnaught. Burley is going to sail her, so that I may judge something of his seamanship. Sha'n't be here again till to-morrow night."

"It takes the lords of creation to break the Sabbath with their impious pleasure-seeking," interposed Aunt Jerusha, with a sniff. "Well, they're the bosses—so far."

CHAPTER XIV.

INDEPENDENT ELEANOR.

"I THOUGHT you might enjoy going along with us, you know," Colonel Sherwood continued, still addressing his daughter, and altogether ignoring the interruption.

"No, thank you, papa," replied Eleanor, in her quiet but decided way. "I don't care to go."

"Sorry for that. However, it's deep into June, and we must both be thinking of getting away for the season. Shall it be Saratoga or Long Branch as an initiative?"

"Neither for me, papa; I shall scarcely leave the city for a resort this season."

He looked at her, first with surprise, then with suspicion: but prudently abstained from an expression of either.

"I shall go alone then," he quietly remarked, going on with his breakfast. "And, in all probability, I shall get away by the middle of the week."

"Eleanor was secretly well satisfied to hear this, which would furnish her with the unrestricted opportunities for which she longed.

"I shall attend the woman's suffrage convention," calmly announced Miss Bigbee, not yet exhilarated beyond her third matutinal cup of tea. "It meets in Philadelphia on Tuesday, and will doubtless continue sitting throughout the week. Ezra, my love," ingratiatingly, "I wish you would oblige me with fifty dollars tomorrow evening."

"Oh, of course," responded the colonel, with good-natured satire. "But I was one of the despotic monsters not so very long ago."

Aunt Jerusha prudently refrained from a retort, and began to stir up her fourth cup with a conveniently preoccupied look over the rim of her spectacles into the inscrutable unknown.

As Colonel Sherwood finished and went out leisurely, with a significant look at his daughter, she forthwith followed him into the library.

"My dear girl," he there began, with more than his usual seriousness, "I understand that you have secured the services of Falconbridge, the detective?"

She implied an affirmative by saying: "Of course, I sha'n't rest, papa, till Charles's innocence is proved and he is once more a free and exonerated man."

The colonel checked a movement of impatience, and his face grew both stern and anxious.

"And is this determination of yours to remain in the city during the hot months part and parcel of the same determination?"

"It is."

"Eleanor, this cuts me to the heart."

"I am sorry for that, father."

"It cuts me to the heart," continued Colonel Sherwood, "to think of your still clinging to that unworthy young man—a State Prison inmate, a rascally convicted forger!"

"It grieves me to say it, father," said Eleanor, with tightening lips, "but should you repeat those last three words, or their equivalent, in my hearing, as a characterization of Charles Howland, you and I will separate—permanently."

The colonel suddenly dropped into a chair, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets, with a helpless, miserable air.

"Let us try to talk it over rationally," he rather groaned than suggested.

"With all my heart, father." And she also seated herself.

He knew from experience that when she addressed him as father, instead of the more familiar "papa," that the will of this strong characterized, self-poised daughter of his was as adamant; but, much and humiliatingly as he felt his inferiority, he could not afford to shirk the attempt upon it at this pass.

"Do you propose marrying the young man, Eleanor," he at length asked, "should you suc-

ceed in exonerating him—as you seem insane enough to imagine you can do?"

"No," she replied, with a little secret smile behind her gravity of mien.

He seemed slightly relieved at this.

"Then why should you interest yourself any further in the man's case?" he asked.

"Why?" her eyes flashed. "Well," striving not to let her contempt appear in her voice, "you, at least, seem capable of the question!"

"Of course, I am," even wonderingly, his moral fiber was so pitiful. "I repeat it."

"As an act of simple justice, then—because it is Charles Howland's simple due!" she cried. "He shall be righted and freed, because he is innocent and wronged."

"The jury thought differently," in a half-timid way.

"Wait till I am through with his case," composedly.

"Look here, Eleanor, your success in what you so wildly propose would consign Burley to State Prison in his stead as an accused perjurer."

"Do I need you to tell me that, father?"

"And yet you receive him kindly, if not encouragingly."

"You mistake, father; only complacently. Just what you asked, and what I promised."

"I honestly believe him an honorable, worthy young man."

"You are at liberty to do so, father."

"He is passionately in love with you."

"So much the worse for John Burley."

"He hopes and expects to marry you."

"His great expectations will assuredly last him his lifetime, then."

"I also hope it, Eleanor."

"I shall never marry John Burley, father. If it will convenience you, however," and she looked at him steadily, "that he should continue hoping to the contrary, you need not necessarily enlighten him."

Colonel Sherwood had been gradually growing disturbed, until his agitation was now very great.

"Would that be treating him very honorably on your part?" he managed to say, with a last attempt at paternal dignity.

"It would be treating an infamous, plotting scoundrel as he deserves. Do we vouchsafe fair play to serpents?"

"Oh, come now!"

"Look you, father, I want to have this matter over and done between you and I once and for all."

"Certainly, Eleanor."

"You once spoke of John Burley having you in some way in his power?"

"It is true," shamefacedly, but still trying to keep himself up.

"In what way? Tell me everything."

"Oh, I—I can't!" And then he broke down, turning away his head.

"Father," her voice had a melodious and pitying sweetness now, "listen to me. You are weak, while I am strong. I shall crush this wretch in my own good time—I know, I feel it—and speedily. Of what weakness have you ever been guilty, the knowledge of which can place you in John Burley's power?—or make you apprehend it would—for I do not believe that such would really be the case. Surely you can trust in my strength, no less than in the mercy of such a man."

He looked up at her with a pitiful mingling of shame, weakness and agony in his face—his old dandy face, with its masked wrinkles, and its contemptible make-up of rouge *poudre de riz* and mustache-dye.

The next instant her strong arms were around him, and he was sobbing like a child upon her noble breast.

Eleanor remained perfectly silent and undemonstrative, only lightly smoothing and patting the poor bowed head, and with the tears just visible in her pitying eyes.

She had never been given to tears, and, though accustomed to repress all kindred agitation by her iron will, it was less through a sense of pride than a heroic consciousness of her womanly strength and what was due to it.

The colonel really seemed to feel better after this break-down, and he primped himself up amazingly under Eleanor's encouraging smiles and words as she resumed her seat.

"I'll tell you everything, my love," said he. "I'll do it, by Jupiter! Twenty-five years ago, before I was married or you were so much as thought of, I—I committed a crime."

"Be brave, father. What was the crime?"

He turned away his face again, but only in order to avoid her eyes.

"Forgery!"

The word was out, scarcely audible, it is true, but distinct.

So this was the man who had dared to reprobate a similar and unproven crime in her husband, Charles Howland?

However, she only said, with infinite gentleness:

"Go on, father. Tell me the story."

"Eleanor, you will hate me, if you do not do so already!"

"Hate you, papa? Are you taking leave of your senses? Come, tell me all about it."

CHAPTER XV.

ELEANOR'S NOBILITY.

COLONEL SHERWOOD seemed nervously himself to a distasteful and humiliating effort.

"I was still only a banker's clerk then, Nelly, but about to start out for myself with another young man, similarly situated. I know what a hypocrite I've been, Nelly, but don't, please don't throw it up to me that Howland was only a banker's clerk, too!"

"Nothing of the sort, father."

"I—I couldn't raise quite the necessary capital, or my share of it, and the prospective partnership, on which I had set my heart, was in danger of falling through."

"I—I forged a rich financier's indorsement on a note, 'hurriedly,' in order to get it cashed. There you are, Nelly," with a long breath. "That is the accursed story."

"But with any disastrous result to yourself, father?"

"None whatever."

"How was that?"

"Once in the swim on our own account, we were successful from the start. I paid the note before it was due. Then, like an egregious ass, I confessed to the financier whose name I had surreptitiously used, craving his pardon and indulgence."

"Rather say, like an honest man, willing and glad to make amends. Did he prosecute you, or threaten it?"

"Bless you, no! He wasn't of that sort, or perhaps had been similarly tempted in his own youthful start."

"What did he do?"

"He was a Californian, Nelly."

"But what did he do?"

"Lectured me severely, promised me to keep it a secret, and invited me to dinner."

"Did he keep it a secret?"

"Oh, yes; he was a gentleman—a brick. But—"

"Go on, father."

"Like the infernal idiot that I was, I neglected to destroy the canceled note, but left it among my old papers."

"Well?"

"Burley got hold of it some way, together with its history, five or six months ago. It is in his possession now."

"Ah! But what of that, if long ago it was both forgiven and canceled?"

"Nelly, I am not rich, if you are. In fact, I am now, and have been for long, just struggling along—keeping up appearances, you know—and hoping for the lucky stroke, which never seems to come, that will enable me just decently to retire."

"Well?" a little impatiently.

"The exposure of that old transaction would hopelessly blast my reputation on the street—or at least with certain powerful and unscrupulous rivals, who would instantly take advantage of it to down me. I would be absolutely ruined."

"So!" there was a suggestive quiver in her voice now. "And John Burley threatens to make this exposure on occasion."

"Not exactly that, Nelly; but then he could do it. It is in his power."

"And he contrives somehow to let you know it?"

"Well—yes."

Eleanor's eyes flashed.

"And yet you have dared to insist upon it to me," indignantly, "that he is an honest young man—a *worthy* young man?"

The colonel bowed his averted head without answering.

"And you have frequently introduced the Creole cur here—have dared to compare him with Charles Howland, to that *gentleman's* disfavor—would even have had me marry him, to save you from his power—which is so much more apparent than real, on the face of it, that I cannot but blush for your understanding, father, as well as for your—your moral feebleness?"

"Don't, Nelly, please don't!" almost whimperingly.

"Well, I sha'n't then," recovering her equanimity with an effort. "Father, I promise to speedily relieve you of this bugbear, but solely on condition of your promise to follow my advice implicitly, unquestioningly."

He looked up at her eagerly. Never before had her strength contrasted his weakness so sharply, or had it seemed that he could lean upon her so trustingly. Her calm, healthful self-confidence was the breath of new life to him.

"By Jupiter! Nelly, you are a wonderful woman!" he exclaimed. "However, so was your dear mother, for that matter, whose ancestors helped to cut off the head of Charles I., and then fought their way among the red-skins as among sheep. I don't believe there's your equal in New York City, or New York State either, for that matter."

"Yes, yes. But your answer to my proposition, if you please, father?"

"Yes, every time, my love! I give you the promise you demand."

"You will follow my guidance absolutely?"

"I swear it!"

"Good! Keep on inviting John Burley here,

let him continue to hope that he may ultimately marry me. I will attend to his case when I get ready."

"But, Nelly—"

"You were not even to question, remember."

"True; but do tell me one thing, my dear."

"What is it?"

"Might you marry the fellow, if he were really worthy, and you liked him well enough, caring for no one else?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because it would be impossible."

"Impossible?"

"Exactly."

"How could that be?"

"I cannot tell you. But you will know some time—so will he."

"Well, you are no less an enigma than an Amazon, Nelly."

"What time were you to join your yacht, papa?"

Colonel Sherwood consulted his time-piece, and then rose hastily.

"No time to lose!" he exclaimed. "God bless you, Nelly! I feel like a new man already."

She kissed him gently as they separated.

A little later on Hugh Spender called.

Eleanor's greeting was even more cordial than was her wont, and she lost no time in acquainting him with her success of the previous afternoon.

The lawyer listened with mingled admiration and amazement.

"I can scarcely believe it!" he exclaimed.

"You succeed almost like magic, where I and others so painstakingly wrought and sought in vain. Even with your cleverness, I can't account for it."

Nelly laughed.

"Don't leave the name and prestige of Falconbridge—though both so unscrupulously borrowed—out of the account."

"But who could have worked even them as you have done? The discovery and identification of the fountain pen was simply immense!"

"For which Florine should have the chief credit."

"My dear cousin, I will not have you depreciate yourself in this way."

"Tell me this, Cousin Hugh," and her earnestness increased. "Would the pen discovery and identification alone do our work?"

He reflected.

"Scarcely, to the full," he replied. "It would make trouble with Burley, in support of a direct charge of perjury; but might not clear up things for Howland altogether. No; we must have those witnesses, too."

"Well, they can be obtained."

"I hope so. The fact of your meeting Burley when coming out of the restaurant is suspicious. Should he get wind of your inquiries, he would lose no time in sending them on their mysterious travels again, and into yet deeper obscurity."

"I have thought of that, but I do not think he can get wind of what I have already discovered. Mr. G—is discreet, I think, and the *chef* is not likely to miss that scrawl from Armonk in a hurry."

"Well," cheerfully, "judging from the start you have made, you have got a right to hope for the best."

"I shall set out in my search for the men tomorrow. My father's absence is my opportunity; though it is not such a great matter if he should learn of my masculine masquerading now. We have had a sort of understanding, which I will some time be at liberty to explain to you, Cousin Hugh. What a pity that it is a Sunday! Now, the question is, which man shall I seek first—John Kennedy at Eagle Rock, or Peter Kelly at Armonk?"

"Where is Armonk?"

"Westchester county, thirty odd miles north. I was once there with a Tally-Ho party."

"And Eagle Rock?"

"In the mountains just back of Orange a mile or two, in New Jersey."

CHAPTER XVI.

PIPE-LAYING.

"I'll tell you what we will do, my dear cousin, as a beginning," suggested Lawyer Spender, after a reflective pause. "We'll begin our inquiries, say at the Jersey locality, today."

"On a Sunday?"

"That must not interfere in an affair like ours. True, the railroad facilities are not of the best on Sunday, but we'll do the best we can."

"Agreed, then," assented Nelly. "I will translate myself into Falconbridge's Double in short order, and to-morrow we'll look up our other absentee in Armonk."

"Wait! I hardly think I can be with you there and then."

"Why not?"

"My mornings are always occupied with the courts, and in the afternoon to-morrow—he hesitated.

"Well, Cousin Hugh?"

"I shall be at Sing Sing—have a sort of engagement there."

Eleanor flushed and then paled a little.

"You are going to visit Charles at the prison," she said, in a low voice.

"Yes."

"How I have longed to go to him! and yet I know his sensitiveness, no less than his love. He would not wish me to see him in the—the prison garb. Against my own heart, I had made a sort of vow only to go when it should be to take him away with me—vindicated, free!"

"An excellent resolve!" said Spender; "and no more, really, against your heart than your understanding, my dear Nelly."

"Still, the temptation to go with you tomorrow is very great."

"Adhere to your first resolution. Wait. Both of you will feel better for it in the happy end."

"Oh," slowly, "I had fully decided on that. When shall you be in Sing Sing?"

"Early in the afternoon."

"I shall go to Armonk in the morning, and my inquiries may possibly lead me on through the greater part of the day."

"Very likely."

"The places are not far apart. Armonk is a secluded village close to the Connecticut line, off the line of any railroad, and not more than ten miles due east from Sing Sing."

"Good! I will drive over to meet you there, and we will compare notes and return to the city together later on. Does that meet with your wishes?"

"Didn't I suggest it? I will be with you again in less than twenty minutes, Cousin Hugh."

At the end of about that time she quitted the house with him in her detective's imitation, after instructing Florine to make her excuses to Aunt Jerusha at lunch.

The pair were fortunate in catching a train for Newark, whence they drove out through Orange in a hired hack to the vicinity of that wild and romantic feature of the Orange Mountains so familiar to many New Yorkers and others as Eagle Rock.

The road for the greater part of the way being so precipitous as to necessitate a slow, tedious gait on the part of the horses, they improved their time by random scraps of conversation with their driver, a jovial Irishman, with a view to extract something from his knowledge of the locality, which was not incon siderable.

But he seemed to know nothing of any Widow Kennedy, nor could any amount of judicious pumping evoke any information on that point.

At last, however, just as they were alighting in the immediate vicinity of the Rock, with its nest of cheap hotels and saloons, he suddenly exclaimed:

"Oive an unexpected oidea, gentlemen. Moight it have been the Widdy Ken-nedy yez were afther askin' about?"

"Yes," promptly replied Spender.

"Och, but every wan knows the Widdy Kennedy an' her Harp of Erin Hotel. It's on the top of the bill beyant, over the new tunnel they be afther buildin'."

"Take us therer at once!" cried "Falconbridge," about to re-enter the coach.

"Twill have to be afut, sor," making fast his horses, "though there's the bist of beer and whisky galore when youze get there."

"All right."

But a grievous disappointment was in store for them.

The Harp of Erin Hotel proved to be the vilest of drinking shanties, crammed to the doors with laborers of various nationalities in all stages of drunkenness, boisterous and otherwise, whose proprietress, an enormously fat old slattern, was either too stupid or too shrewd to prove in the slightest degree available for the information in request.

After wasting hours in uselessly circulating among her dangerous patrons, insinuating their queries with no better result than with herself, and with no small risk of getting into serious trouble by reason of the suspicions excited, they quitted the den and its neighborhood in supreme disappointment and disgust, at least upon Eleanor's part.

On their return to Newark, however, their coachman, mellowed by the beer he had ingulfed at their expense, besides receiving a sweetener in addition to the fare demanded, touched his hat and:

"Moight yez be sairchin' for the mon on a criminal charge, gentlemen?"

"By no means," quickly responded the pretended detective, "but to secure him as a witness in a most important case."

"An' his name?"

"John Kennedy, until recently a waiter in a large New York restaurant," designating the same."

"Me own name is Michael O'Rafferty, at your Honor's service. An' if it w'u'd be worth me while, Oi moight be able to lairn of his whereabouts, an' let yez know."

"It would be worth your while, my friend," interrupted Spender, though not very enthusiastically. "You would be handsomely paid for

your information." And he gave the man his card, with but little hope of ever hearing from him again.

The trip to Armonk on the following day was with no better result, the desired man in that quarter, having but recently quitted his employment, and gone off none would or could tell whither, but with room for a strong presumption that the move had been contrived by Burley's beforehandness.

To make a long story short, the search was diligently prosecuted in both directions for the next two weeks without the slightest encouragement.

"You ought to be hopelessly discouraged by this time, my poor Nelly," Spender said to her at the end of this period.

"Discouraged, but not hopelessly so, Cousin Hugh," was the brave response. "Burley's means can scarcely allow him to keep up this expensive hide-and-seek game for those men forever, and our luck must turn sooner or later."

At the same time there was a secret sinking at her heart, for here were the days and even the weeks slipping away to no purpose, and she had promised Howland that he should be righted and freed within a month.

Spender looked at her with a pity that he could with difficulty refrain from expressing.

Notwithstanding that her iron resolution was intact, she had grown perceptibly paler and thinner, her darkly beautiful face, moreover, betraying day by day more indubitably the stress of the anxiety and hope deferred that was gnawing and preying upon her heart.

"Perhaps we had better make an essay with the fountain-pen evidence alone," he suggested.

"No," firmly. "You yourself allowed that it might not be sufficient. We will wait, work and—hope."

And from this hour it did seem that the luck was beginning to turn.

Colonel Sherwood was still away at his summer vacation, leaving his business chiefly in Burley's charge, and Aunt Jerusha was long since back from the Philadelphia convention, with fresh and ever multiplying woman's rights schemes thickening in her militant brain.

Scarcely had Spender taken his departure on this occasion—it was the early evening of a very hot day—when Burley put in a smiling appearance for an evening call.

We say smiling advisedly, for by this time, so agreeably had he been received—or rather, so thoroughly had Eleanor come to mask her real and growing repugnance for the man—that he made not a doubt he would soon be able to speak out his heart to her, with every prospect of success.

"I am going to venture upon a little proposition, Miss Sherwood," said he.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LUCK TURNS.

"WHAT is your proposition, Mr. Burley?" inquired Eleanor, rather languidly.

"I want to beg that you will take a short excursion in the Farnsworth with me," Burley said, not without diffidence.

Then, as she made no immediate reply, he continued:

"You see, I have entire control of the yacht in your father's absence, and she is in tiptop condition. Of course," with a laugh, seeing that she was not particularly delectated with the notion, "Miss Bigbee and whatever other friend or friends you might wish would be welcome, in order to—to keep within the proprieties, you know."

"Oh, yes; as a matter of course." Still without any enthusiasm.

"Perhaps your cousin, Mr. Spender, would like to go, too. He has been looking overworked of late, I have been sorry to note."

It was like pulling a tooth, this including of Hugh Spender in his invitation, but, in view of Eleanor's continued distaste, or reluctance, there seemed no help for it.

"It might be a real relaxation for both Aunt Jerusha and Cousin Hugh," Eleanor said.

"But not for yourself?"

"I do not say that, Mr. Burley," with one of her flashing smiles, all the more treasured by reason of their rarity for him, and the artificiality of which he had not yet been able to discover. "But it is a question whether I can afford to indulge myself to that extent."

"This useless detective business is wearing you out," he observed, with difficulty masking a scowl—"literally wearing you out."

Her connection with the Falcon Detective, as he thought, was as much a source of resentment to him as ever, if not more so, though he had by this time done more toward spying upon her movements in the detective character than she had any idea of.

"When do you propose to take the sail, Mr. Burley?"

"This is a Monday. How would Thursday suit your convenience, Miss Sherwood?"

"As well as any other day, if the trip is to be a brief one."

"Up the Sound and back the same day."

"Well, speak to Cousin Hugh. If he is agreeable, Aunt Jerusha and I will be in readiness—provided the weather is decent, of course."

It was not a very complimentary acceptance of the invitation, but he pretended to be overjoyed.

"This is real good of you!" he seized her hand, and pressed it significantly before she could withdraw it. "How kind you are!"

"Pray don't mention it."

"I'll see Spender to-night, if possible, and send you word the first thing in the morning. By the way, Miss Sherwood, there's something odd about that great detective you have become so engrossed with."

"What is that, Mr. Burley?"

"Singular. He is never at his down-town office, which still remains close-locked, and even the janitor hasn't seen anything of him as yet."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; and he seems, from what I can learn, to be singularly difficult of access to his hosts of acquaintances and friends."

"He will doubtless feel complimented to know of your interesting yourself so deeply in his affairs, Mr. Burley."

"Oh," in some confusion, "as to that—"

"Mr. Falconbridge—the very Major Falconbridge that you are displaying such an interest in, Mr. Burley," with a smile, of whose double meaning he could of course have no inkling, "is at present exclusively devoted to my employment. When that is finished, perhaps he will give attention to his office duties. It is his affair."

"Forgive me, Eleanor—Good heavens! I beg your pardon, Miss Sherwood. But I really had no intention to intrude upon your private concerns."

"Don't forget to see Mr. Spender aenent the yachting excursion, Mr. Burley." Suavely, and, with another artificial smile she dismissed him.

Burley haunted the adjacent Park until he could obtain an interview with the French maid, with whom he imagined himself to be progressing even more swimmingly than with the mistress, and then took himself down-townward.

But he had unfortunately used his handkerchief with some carelessness while making his adieu to Miss Sherwood, and hardly had he gone before she held in her hand a letter which he had inadvertently dropped.

The envelope was broken, it was addressed to himself, and she detected a familiarity in the wretchedly scrawled superscription.

In a moment she had mastered the contents. They bore the date of the preceding Saturday, at Pound Ridge, Westchester County, and were as follows:

"MISTER BURLY:—So you now think ten dollars a week oughter be satisfactory to me, and living up here in this dirty kuntry hole to bute, with nothing but chaw bacons, kows, ducks and pigs for company.

"Well, I don't. Tak nottis according."

"P. KELLY.

Though it may not always pour when it rains, in support of the ancient proverb, it is none the less true that when Fortune does turn in one's favor, after a long withholding of her fickle smiles, she does so somewhat prodigally and without reservation.

Early next morning Hugh Spender called, his shrewdly honest face the index of a decidedly cheerful frame of mind.

"I have good news," he said.

"So have I," replied Nelly, brightly. "What is yours?"

"You remember the Newark coachman, O'Rafferty?"

"Of course."

"Well, who would have expected to hear from him again? Read this, which I received scarcely an hour ago." And he handed her a letter.

It was from the coachman, briefly, though not elegantly, to the effect that he had got track of the John Kennedy in request, which information would be promptly furnished on personal application to him, together with a hint that it could not be bad for nothing.

"We're doubtless at the turn of the tide," exclaimed the young woman, joyfully. "Read that. And she handed him her letter, or rather Burley's, with a word or two of explanation.

Spender did so with such satisfaction as may be imagined.

"We ought to follow these hints up without delay," he said.

"Of course, or there is no telling when Burley may next forestall us. You saw him last night?"

"Yes; and accepted his yachting invitation for Thursday next. I guessed such to be your wish."

"It was; as it may help to lull his suspicions to rest until the crowning moment."

"Good idea!"

"Can you take to-day off from your office business?"

"I shall do so, at all events."

"Thank you, Cousin Hugh! Set off for Jersey at once, then, while the great Falconbridge," with a smile, "is on the Westchester county trail with scarcely less delay."

It was so arranged, but as Spender was taking his leave he paused in hesitation.

"Cousin Nelly," said he, "I can't think of your taking up your side of this double quest alone, without a feeling of disquietude."

"What! in my Falcon Detective character?"

"Yes; even then."

"Why?"

"There is more danger of Burley interfering with you than with me. Your information reached him first hand, and he is no less likely to miss that letter than to surmise where he lost it, and consequently the likelihood of its having fallen into your hands."

"And, through mine, into those of the great detective, eh?"

"Exactly."

"Dismiss your anxiety, my dear cousin. The name of Falconbridge is alone a tower of strength, as you must have perceived by this time, if you were not alive to it before. Moreover, he is never unarmed. *Au revoir*, cousin mine, till this evening—come to dinner if you can—and may our good fortune continue!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

"THE GIANT'S ROBE."

ELEANOR had by this time become so familiar with her masculine personation as to carry it with perfect abandon, and with no other fear, of the counterfeit being detected save in the contingency of her distinguished prototype's actual return from his foreign mission, of which there seemed to be little probability, judging from what she and her faithful coadjutor had been able to gather as to the existing state of the case.

It must be allowed, that circumstances thus far had singularly favored the success of her personation.

Both the real Falcon Detective, and his little familiar, Tommy Dodd, had now been absent somewhere in the Levant for more than six months, the object of their errand being the running down of a defaulter in the interests of a wealthy far-western corporation. Moreover, notwithstanding that the supposed mysterious return of Falconbridge to New York was by this time known to not a few of his acquaintances, and daily of a necessity becoming more so as the audacious young woman had continued her counterfeit presentment with increased boldness and assiduity in the undaunted and untiring prosecution of her search for the missing witnesses, there seemed no danger as yet of this coming prematurely to the knowledge of the corporation referred to before she should cease to have further use of the character. Only let them hold off that long, she thought, and the detective's Double should disappear as mysteriously and incontinently as he had appeared; though, in the event of the true Falconbridge's subsequent return, it was her intention to make a frank confession of the deception practiced—and all but forced upon her, as she thought—together with whatever indemnity he might see fit to demand, if any.

As a matter of ordinary prudence, she had preserved as much secrecy in her exploiting of the part as was practicable. But when association with her original's acquaintances or admirers had been unavoidable, she had not shunned them, but merely sought refuge in the taciturnity for which he was characteristic, and thus far with complete success.

Indeed, her success in this perilous particular had not been dissimilar to that of the giant's robe as disported by the dissembler in the fable. But none the less did she never lose consciousness of the inevitable catastrophe therein, where the majestic robe was at last blown away by the tempest of fate, to the exposure and ruin of the enterprising masquerader, with the concomitant anxieties as applicable to herself.

Nevertheless, her assumption of the great detective's mantle had been attended with a sense of protection, rather than of disquietude, and it was now in the very best of spirits that she resumed her disguise with her accustomed carefulness and dispatch, and set out upon her freshened quest, after leaving word with Florine and Miss Bigbee (who, it will be remembered, was also in her secret) that she might be absent all day, if not longer.

"Truly my niece is a most extraordinary young woman," commented Aunt Jerusba, when the detective's Double had slipped away. "I could scarcely have supported this difficult character more successfully myself."

"Perhaps not, ma'm," replied Florine, with forced gravity.

"Not that I would attempt such a personation under any circumstances," severely. "To impersonate a man—a representative of the ruthless tyrants of our sex? Pah! And this, too, mind you, Duprez, notwithstanding that I confess to an admiration of Joan of Arc. However, consistency's a jewel," enthusiastically, "and I continue to flaunt it defiantly in my woman's crown! No, no, my dear; we'll live or die by our sex, unmasked, untrammeled, undisguised. In the language of the immortal Shakespeare (why may he not have been a woman in disguise, by the way? Little is known of him personally,) 'Blow, winvis, come wrack! at least we'll die with—with dress-waists on our backs!'

"Yes, ma'm," with continued demureness;

"but hardly that, or even with our corsets, if we happen to be in bed at the time."

"Florine," scornfully, "you have neither spirit nor poetry in your giddy and skin-deep composition."

"Yes, ma'm; I suppose so. But I do like the messieurs. It must be because I can't help it."

This was in Eleanor's dressing-room, and a little later on, after a ring at the street-door, the footman came up to announce that, early as was the hour, Mr. Burley was below, and very desirous of seeing Miss Sherwood on an important matter.

"Madeleine is out for the day," replied Florine. "I will see Monsieur Burley."

She accordingly sought him in the smaller drawing room, where he was impatiently waiting, with the same piece of information.

Burley seemed unusually disturbed, but he knew better than to doubt the maid's words, Eleanor being rigid in enforcing truthfulness with regard to her being at home, or not at home, as he knew by experience.

"Where is she gone?" he demanded savagely.

"Monsieur would do well to keep his temper, and find out for himself," was the spirited reply.

"What is the matter with you, Florine?" with an effort to command his temper. "Do you forget the understandings, the all but compacted plans, that have passed between us?"

"Monsieur," with a peculiar smile, "I am sometimes hard of hearing; to say nothing of my being sadly in want of another new dress, and no money to buy it with."

Burley bit his lip. The mercenariness of the girl was no secret to him, notwithstanding that he still believed that he was deceiving her understanding and inflaming her imagination with his side-plot for the security of her secret services. But the sum of money that he had set aside from his little patrimony as being all that he could safely afford in the prosecution of these joint villainies in order to keep Howland in prison, at least until he should have succeeded in marrying Eleanor himself, was all but gone, though he dared not let Florine suspect it.

"You have had a good deal of money from me already, my dear," he replied, with a forced smile.

"What will monsieur have when he marries mademoiselle?"

"Ah! but the dresses I see you wear of late are very pretty and stylish, Florine."

"I am fastidious, monsieur. Besides, one cannot live on air."

"You shall have the wherewithal for a nice new gown when I see you again, Florine; at least, I think so."

"I will thank you when I get it, Monsieur Juan."

"Time enough." And then with an uneasy scowl as his agitation returned: "I dropped a letter somewhere last evening, Florine, and most likely in this very room, while making my adieux to Miss Sherwood."

"I know nothing of it, monsieur."

He eyed her piercingly.

"You are quite sure?"

"I really know nothing of it, monsieur." Which was the truth.

"When was the detective here?" with abruptness, after a moment's reflection.

"This morning. He left shortly before your arrival."

"Ha! with mademoiselle?"

"No; alone."

"But had he first communicated with your mistress?"

"Very likely; though I cannot be certain as to that."

"Au revoir, Florine; don't forget what is in store for our future."

And he was off like a shot, without the least attempt at the trifling that was his wont.

He had fortunately arranged the office business so that he could indulge in a brief vacation, business being extremely dull.

He made a bee-line for Third avenue, caught a down-bound Elevated train, and reached the Grand Central Station with the least possible delay, and rushed into the Harlem Railroad waiting-room just as the last "All aboard for the Chatham Express!" echoed through the apartment.

He gave a sickening look first at the indicator, then at the clock, which tallied with it almost to the minute, and then rushed across the floor.

But he was too late, the uniformed gatekeeper motioning him blandly back, and the heavy door communicating with the trains closing with a remorseless click almost in his face.

Just ere it did so, he caught a glimpse of one of the last ticket-holders who had just succeeded in catching train-time by the forelock, or rather by the tail.

It was the detective.

"I must get that train," he exclaimed to the attendant. "There's money for you," in a lower voice, "if you let me pass."

"Display your ticket, sir."

"I haven't bad time to buy one, but—"

Another official was approaching, and the gatekeeper shook his head imperatively.

It wouldn't do to make a row. Burley darted to the ticket-hole, but several purchasers were

before him. At last he got his ticket for Bedford Station, but simultaneously heard the whistle of the out-going train with which he had failed to connect.

"When is the next train for Bedford Station?" he demanded of the agent, with such composure as he could command.

"Nine-thirty."

It was now but eight-thirty, an early breakfast, which Eleanor always insisted on when her father chanced to be from home, having enabled her to make an exceptionally timely start.

Burley sunk upon one of the benches, secretly eating up his heart with hatred, disappointment and not a little downright terror.

CHAPTER XIX.

ENCOURAGEMENT.

In the mean time our adventurous detective's Double hopefully steamed and rambled northward with no consciousness of the sleuthing she had escaped, though not without tacitly accepting the possibility, if not the probability, of such a thing.

She had also visited Pound Ridge when on the coaching expedition heretofore alluded to, though she could scarcely claim a familiarity with the locality.

It is an insignificant hamlet in the township of the same name, in the northeastern corner of Westchester county, within two miles of the Connecticut line, about nine due east of the Harlem Railroad at Bedford Station, or, say, ten from Mount Kisco, the next station to the south thereof.

She had taken a ticket for the last-named place, by reason of knowing it as a comparatively large village, where she would be more likely to obtain livery stable accommodations than at Bedford Station.

Arriving at Mount Kisco in a little more than an hour, she procured a serviceable conveyance with but little delay, and after a two-hours' drive over a poor road, for the most part very billy and stony, at last reached her destination.

She had engaged the conveyance for the entire day.

After many fruitless inquiries, it was not till after obtaining lunch, of which she was greatly in need, at the village tavern, that on observantly strolling into the bar-room, she overheard a rough but honest-looking man, who had stepped in there from a wagon-load of newly-sawed lumber at the door, inveighing against the difficulty he had in securing experienced labor at a saw-mill of which it seemed he was the proprietor.

In the course of his remarks, she caught an allusion to "that stupid ass, Kelly, who knew no more about the work for which he had engaged than an eating-house waiter, and seemed to care still less."

The detective's Double pricked up his ears (if we may be allowed to change the gender thus abruptly and arbitrarily, as occasionally heretofore, for convenience sake), and was at once keenly attentive.

The landlord of the inn, to whom the complaints were addressed, burst into a short laugh.

"What! that dude, Pete Kelly?" he said. "Why, that's just what he professed to have been when lying around my place here, before I bounced him, as his money run out, without much prospect, as it seemed to me, of his getting any more of his boasted remittances, as he called them—a waiter at a bang-up Broadway wine room and restaurant in York!"

"Well, he ought to have stuck to his trade then," grumbled the mill-owner, "for I'll warrant he knows more about steering a dish under a hungry man's nose—his own especially—than about guiding a maple log into a whip-saw. However, I've already given him warning. But good-by, Tom, or I'll never get down to Kisco with that load."

No sooner had the man gone than "Falconbridge," who had spent money liberally at the bar, before eating and paying what he was sure was double the ordinary price for his dinner, seized upon a convenient excuse to inquire of the landlord the whereabouts of the saw-mill.

"It is only a mile and a half to the northeast of here, at the foot of the Lower Pond of Trinity Lake, which is one of the sources of Mianus River," was the affable reply. "Purdy's Mill; that's the name. Be you thinking of locating, stranger?"

"Hardly. Only fagged out with city work, and on the lookout for the picturesque."

"Well, you'll find enough of it at Purdy's Mill, by Jingol! Nothing but rocks, crags and precipices, teeming with scorpions, and shutting in one of the wildest, prettiest sheets of water in the world. At least, we think so in these parts, without having seen much of any other, you know. But that Park phaeton you were driven here in won't be able to get within more than a quarter of a mile of the mill, I reckon, without a bigger risk of the wheels than I'd be willing to take if I owned it."

"Thanks! I fancy that will be near enough for prospecting. By the way, my friend, what are scorpions?"

"Why, scorpions."

"Scorpions—in this climate?"

"To be sure; pizen snakes, you know. But,

now I come to think of it, some folks call 'em copperheads."

"Ah!"

The driver of the phaeton was hurriedly summoned, and given the requisite instructions.

Half an hour later, when the driver, after a scramble up and down about the worst roads in his passenger's experience or conception, came to a pause at the top of a lofty hill, with the announcement that the mill was in sight below, but that he couldn't venture to proceed any further, the "detective" sprung out of the carriage with commendable alacrity.

Below him the narrow, crooked lake, with the mill set in the deep hollow at its foot, and the landlord had not over-stated the wild and savage picturesqueness of its surroundings.

But the detective had no time for even admiration just now, and he at once set off down the remainder of what was more like the bed of a dried-up mountain torrent than a road, after instructing the driver to await his return, no matter how long he might delay.

"They do say, sir," the man called after him, "that there's a better path along the edge of the cliff over yonder." And, as the other looked around, he pointed to where the steep on which he was halting overbowed the bosom of the water, a hundred feet or so below.

Not loth to take advantage of a better path, "Falconbridge" nodded his thanks, sought and found the one referred to, and which was certainly an improvement upon the road itself, though certainly somewhat more perilous.

It led steeply down, wound along the very edge of the precipice that sheered down perpendicularly into the lake, and was scarcely more than wide enough for two pedestrians to pass each other on its thread-like indication, by reason of an equally perpendicular rock-wall of lesser height which rose for a greater part of the distance on the inner side.

However, it was comparatively smooth, which, taken in connection with the fact that the detective-personator was exceptionally cool-headed and sure of foot, with no little experience as a mountain climber, was the chief thing to be desired.

He speedily made the descent, coming out quite close to the mill, one of whose saws was uselessly in motion, to perceive a solitary workman, or rather idler, sitting half-asleep in the drowsy sunshine, on a chestnut log, which doubtless, but for his laziness, should be undergoing the process of being sawed into boards.

"Hallo, Peter Kelly!" cried the new-comer, taking the chances of its being the right man, and good-naturedly advancing; "you seem to be taking it easy enough here, it seems to me."

The man started, and then surveyed the other with some suspicion.

He looked woe-begone and was ragged.

"Aisy, is it, sor?" he exclaimed. "Faith, an' I find it the devil's hard wurk, which is the raison I avoid it whiniver the boss is away. Who and what are you, sor?"

The intruder remembered his recognition in the wine-room, and the sensation it had caused.

"Who and what else but Falconbridge, the Falcon Detective?" he replied.

CHAPTER XX.

SUCCESS.

At this announcement, which seemed simply terrifying to its bearer, the man fell upon his knees and clasped his hands.

"Och, murther!" he faltered; "the great detective? But you wudn't arrest me, sor? I'm not guilty of any crime no more than the babe unborn!"

"Who said you were? and I've no intention of arresting you," said the "detective," reassuringly. "Stand up like a man, Peter, and let me have a little talk with you."

The woe-begone fugitive rather tremblingly obeyed.

The "detective" then tersely made it clear to his understanding what he was wanted in New York for, dwelt briefly but pronouncedly upon Burley's villainy, and its consequences to an innocent man, and concluded with these words:

"Now let me tell you the state of your own predicament, Peter Kelly, when you can tell me whether I am right or wrong."

"Through Burley's promises, you have thrown up a good, remunerative employment in New York, and now find yourself living from hand to mouth among the rude rustics of this savage place, unused to the rough manual labor imposed upon you, often hungry, still oftener thirsty, half in rags, and with the plotter's promised remittances—like enough reduced from the original amount promised—growing few and far between, and hardly knowing which way to turn or how to better yourself. Right or wrong?"

"Right to a trivet!" half-yelled the unfortunate Irishman. "The devil burn that Mistrer Burley for cat's m'ate! He was to have sent me fifteen dollars a wake for a year, an' he cut me down to ten in less than a fortnight, an' now it's twelve days since I saw the side or color of his dirty money, though I ha'nt the little post-office at the Ridge, demandin' me letter till they sing songs about me, an' call me the ghost of the letter that never came. Bad 'cess to the oma-

dhoun! but for his glib spache an' oily promises, I'd still be a happy waither at Mistrer G—'s, wid plinty to ate an' drinck, good wages, an' tips galore. Och! but it's murthered wid me bad luck that I am intoirely." And the duped Peter Kelly disdained not to bow his head in his hands and weep.

"Listen to what I propose," urged the "detective," when he had in some measure effected the man's composure. "You shall go away with me at once. I shall install you in good quarters, where you shall be well taken care of, with light work, until I shall be ready to send for you, and then I promise you a return to your former employment, or to get you a better one."

Peter's face had already begun to shine, though it became momentarily clouded again.

"Is it to the detention house, sor, yez wudn't send me?" he asked, with a quick look.

Eleanor had come to think of a country cousin of hers, whose fine farm she had often visited at Merrit's Corners, but two or three miles west of Mount Kisko, and with whom she was a great favorite.

"By no means," she replied, and then suggested his obtaining light employment on the farm in question, at her instance, adding: "In addition to this, I shall pay you twenty dollars a week as long as you are out of your professional employment, the first payment of which shall be made in advance to-day, upon my leaving you at the farm. And the only return I ask is that you keep perfectly quiet, have no communication with Mr. Burley, and be in readiness when I want you in the city."

Peter gave a wild whoop, and, leaping high in the air, cracked his heels together.

"Twinty dollars, an' all the rest of it!" he yelled. "God bless you, sor! Are ye an angel in boots an' trowsers, or only the ch'ate of me siven sinses? Wait till I get me bundle an' sticke, an' I'm wid you in the toot of a bag-piper!"

"Hold on a bit!" interposed the "detective." "Perhaps I have been a little too fast. Did you read the newspaper accounts of the trial and conviction of Charles Howland?"

"I did, sor. Bad 'cess to me in listening to that villain's temptations, when a wurrd from me lips moight have stipped in betwane that virtuous young gentleman an' his unjust imprisonment!"

"What could you testify to under oath?"

"Faix, not much, sor! Only that I paped over the 'petition' wall of the cabbynet, and saw Mistrer Burley write and sign the chick what the other young gentleman was convicted of forging (God pardon me!) and hand him the same, besides overhearing some wurrds he said at the toime."

"To what effect?"

"That he owed him five hundred dollars, and there was the chick for the amount."

The other gave a joyful movement, which, however, he instantly checked.

"That will do, Peter. Run for you stick and bundle."

The man danced rather than ran away, and quickly returned provided for the journey.

"Aren't you going to shut off the mill before you go?" demanded the "detective."

"Devil a bit, your Honor. There's but wan saw joggin' up an' down, an' it's lonely it wudn't be shstandin' shstill, wid nothing to occupy its moind."

"All right."

Eleanor therefore sent Peter straight up the rocky road, to await him at the carriage on the hilltop, and then set out to return as he had come.

She could now unstintedly enjoy the wild scenery along the perilous, cliff-clinging path; and, indeed, felt the novelty of being alone, but briefly, with her great sense of gratitude and relief.

But when only midway up the airy trail, and at its most dangerous point, steps were heard coming down toward her.

The next moment John Burley, panting and pale, but with the face of a demon, was before her.

"Dog of a detective!" he hoarsely growled; "you have partly prevailed against me—I see it in your eyes. But you shall not live to enjoy your triumph!"

He tore open his waistcoat, produced his poniard with the rapidity of thought, and precipitated himself on the Falcon Detective's Double with the savagery of a fiend.

But at the same instant Eleanor—heroically standing her ground, though very pale beneath her artificially-darkened complexion—had drawn the revolver, with which she had taken the precaution to provide herself, leveled and fired.

The bullet went wide of its mark, but the result was not the less unforeseen and disastrous for the infuriated ruffian.

The descending blade struck the extended pistol-barrel, slightly wounding himself in the thigh, and, forgetful of his situation, he raised it again, and swerved to one side for a surer stroke.

At the same instant he lost his footing and toppled over, with a sharp, despairing cry.

Amazed and appalled, Eleanor could at first scarcely believe the evidence of her senses.

She looked over and down, however, after the plunging body till it disappeared with a dull splash into the lake, sixty or seventy feet below.

How terrible is the ending of human life by sudden or unexpected violence, to the sensitive soul of womanhood.

This man was a villain, had been the ruthless foe of her dearest love, and she had as ruthlessly baffled his plots with counter-plots, desirous of his destruction; but to think of his death, even virtually at his own hand, and while it was raised against her own life—no, she could not as yet have desired that, and would have been incomparably shocked if her self-defensive bullet had done more than merely wound or disable.

A moment later, however, an expression of thankfulness, utterly undeserved, broke from her lips.

Burley had risen to the surface, and, though seemingly somewhat dazed, was swimming vigorously.

He could not effect a landing anywhere along the foot of the sheer crag, and therefore directed himself to the shore beyond the head of the mill race, a considerable distance away.

Eleanor rapidly retraced her steps, to reach the point first for his encouragement, for there would be danger of a drowning struggle with the lightning-swift water at the head of the race.

Before reaching the latter, however, she perceived him battling with the arrowy current, and involuntarily stood still and in silence.

In a few minutes, nevertheless, success crowned the man's undaunted efforts.

She saw him gain the strip of low-lying shore beyond, climb with extreme difficulty the green bank, stagger and reel like a drunken man, and then fall prostrate, where he lay motionless.

Crossing the race by a narrow foot-bridge, the detective's Double hurried to him.

The man was senseless from shock and exhaustion, and would be likely to recover, unaided, at any moment.

She saw this at a glance, and was correspondingly rejoiced.

Then another feature of the accident caught her attention, giving rise to a new thought.

CHAPTER XXI.

"IT NEVER RAINS BUT IT POURS."

The insensible man's waistcoat was still as he had torn it open to obtain the knife with which he had menaced her life.

At one side of the interior was the small, reinforced pocket which had been the weapon's hidden receptacle.

At the other side was a broader, commonplace pocket, from which peeped a worn red morocco pocketbook, together with something else from behind it, a thinner pocketbook, most likely, but carefully swathed in delicate oil-skin, as if to preserve its contents with the utmost caution and care.

There was something intensely secretive and important suggested by the appearance of this last.

Obedient to the impulse of her new thought—perhaps her new hope—Eleanor deftly abstracted this secretive-looking pocket-book, while carefully avoiding the other, which doubtless contained the man's money.

Unwinding the oil-skin, its contents were found to consist exclusively of half a dozen or more folded papers.

Swiftly examining the interior writing of each, one after another, she came upon one, an old-looking letter, whose contents caused an expression of supreme joy and thankfulness to spring into her face.

She unscrupulously appropriated this paper, returned it to the pocket-book, and then painstakingly secured the latter in the oil-skin just as she had found it, after which she put it back behind the red morocco one in the man's pocket.

Then, not giving him another thought, she hurried away, the entire interruption, tragic as it might have been, not having occupied more than fifteen minutes.

Regaining the top of the hill by the steep rocky road—nothing could have induced her to resume the cliff path—she found Peter Kelly patiently awaiting her at the side of the carriage, stick and bundle between his knees.

"This man will accompany me back to Mount Kisko," the detective's Double said to the driver. "And when we get there, I shall want to hire a horse and wagon for us two alone, which I shall drive myself, and subsequently send back by another hand."

"All right, sir," was the reply. "You can be accommodated with almost anything at Barney Tompkins's stable."

She then got in with her protege, and they drove away.

A short distance back, a horse attached to a light driving cart was observed tied to a tree near the roadside.

It was doubtless the one in which Burley had driven over from Bedford Station; but being partly hidden from view by the surrounding trees, it escaped the attention of Eleanor's companions.

Old Falcon's Double.

The return trip, being for the most part down-hill, was accomplished in comparatively short time.

They got back to Mount Kisco before it was quite three o'clock.

Here the required horse and buggy were procured with but little delay, after Eleanor had left a liberal money deposit as security for their return.

In less than an hour thereafter, she landed her man safely at her cousin's farm-house gate, near Merrit's Corners, an inconspicuous station on the New York and Northern Railroad.

This farmer cousin of Eleanor's was a prosaic, kind-hearted old bachelor named Matson, with whom she had ever been a great favorite, though of course he did not recognize her now.

It was some time before he could get over his astonishment after she had explained her disguise to him in private, besides enlightening him in such other respects as she deemed necessary, but he did so at last.

"Well, Nelly, if you don't take the cake," he exclaimed, "I'd like to know what gal does or can. Of course I'll manage the thing for you. But does old Ezra Sherwood know of your masquerading in this outlandish fashion?"

"He does not, as a matter of course, Cousin Luke," she replied, with the decision of manner with which he was apparently familiar. "And moreover, he is not to know until I get ready to tell him. Don't forget to bear that in mind, if you please."

"Nough said! Your Irishman can remain here, and do as he likes till you see fit to send for him. In the mean time, I'm as dumb as a fish, and I'll see to it that the turnout is returned to Kisco at once, around by way of Pine's Bridge, so that they'll think you abandoned it at that point."

Thanking him warmly, she next made the advanced payment she had promised to Peter Kelly, besides further satisfying herself as to the genuineness of his repentance and discretion.

She then returned to the city by the adjacent railroad, slipped back into the house without attracting attention to her disguise, and was ready for dinner in her own proper and lovely person before it was ready for her.

"Anything happened?" had been her first question of Florine, while the change of costume was in progress.

"Nothing in particular, ma'mselle. Only a letter for you—I think from monsieur your papa."

"Give it me, and then try to get some of the dust and railroad smoke out of my hair."

The letter was from Newport, whither the colonel had at last drifted in his summer pleasure, but it was the reverse of cheerful.

The letter concluded with the following paragraph:

"My dear girl, you must feel, since that memorable interview of ours, that I now trust in your superior nerve, strength and understanding implicitly, to avert the sword that Burley continues to suspend over my head, as by a single thread. But something really must be done, and mighty soon, to either placate or crush him. He has written me several business letters since I have been away. In not one of these has he failed to convey an urgent hint of his power over me, together with his dissatisfaction at your ambiguous slowness in responding to his addresses, and your continued mysterious connection with that Falconbridge chap. You see, he has in his possession a twenty-year old letter of mine, written to and generously returned to me thereafter by that gentleman against whom I had sinned, and who so nobly forgave me, and in which the whole confession of my wrong-doing is set forth without reservation. Why did I not burn it long ago? you will think. The devil only knows, for I don't. Without that miserable letter in his possession, I could laugh at John Burley, and kick him from desk to street, for no one would believe his unsupported word as against mine; but as it is—he has me at his mercy, and I am afraid he is growing bolder and desperate. Now, my dear girl, do try to be a little extra good to the rascal, at least for a while, until you are quite ready to declare your true hand. Don't make any bones about getting out with him now and then; and if he should happen to give you a run in the Fearnought, give him a show. Anything to wheedle and pull him into a fanned state of self-satisfaction, so that he shall at least leave me with my summer vacation in peace. I may take a run up to the city almost any day, to see how you are getting along."

Eleanor put down the letter with a feeling of pure pity for the writer's ingenuous mingling, as you might say, of pusillanimity and selfishness.

Then she smiled, called for writing materials, and, even before her toilette was completed, penned the following brief lines in reply:

"DEAR PAPA:—

"Dismiss your apprehensions in that. Whatever, he may flatter himself to the contrary, I have got him *dead*, as one of your club sayings goes."

"However, there may be tedious preliminaries at this season of the year, and a cat may still play with her mouse, especially when the latter is a rattlesnake in disguise."

E. S."

Directly after dinner, Hugh Spender called, looking completely fagged out, but triumphant.

"Successful!" was his only word at greeting.

"I, too!" replied Eleanor, with sparkling eyes. And she forthwith gave him a succinct account of her expedition and its outcome.

"This is absolutely amazing!" was the lawyer's delighted comment. "Much as I have been congratulating myself on my own success, yours outdoes it ten to one."

"Still, you found your man?"

"Yes."

"Whereabouts?"

"In Atlantic City."

"Tell me all about it!" said Nelly; and she settled herself down for the narration.

CHAPTER XXII.

BURLEY'S PERTINACITY.

SPENDER'S account of his search for the missing witness, John Kennedy, was soon told.

Under the Newark backman's directions, which he had been compelled to pay smartly for in advance, he had first looked for his man in a hotel at Asbury Park, where he had last been heard of as a cook's assistant, under the assumed name of Dillon.

But it was only to find that the fellow had thrown up his employment several days before, and gone off, no one seemed to know whither.

At last, however, one of the hotel chambermaids, upon whom the itinerant seemed to have made something of an impression, was brought to light, who confessed that Kennedy had told her he would seek a lighter job as waiter among the big hotels, mainly patronized by Philadelphians, at Atlantic City.

It was further extracted from her that the man had grown morose and anxious, chiefly, as he had admitted to her, because of the sudden and unaccountable failure of certain weekly remittances, upon which he had theretofore greatly depended.

Reaching Atlantic City, Spender fortunately came upon a young detective of his acquaintance.

With his assistance, he began a round of investigation of the numerous hotels of the resort, which promised to be a long and tedious one, inasmuch as the place was crowded with boarders and transient pleasure-seekers, the employees alone comprising a population of several thousand.

Fortune had somewhat favored him, however, and in the fourth hotel visited, the Shoreside, he had at last alighted upon his man.

But Kennedy had not been quite so easily brought to terms as his brother-fugitive Peter Kelly.

While no less furious than the latter against Burley, for the non-payment of his weekly stipulation, he was in far less needy circumstances than the former, inasmuch as he was doing capitally in his new situation, and that without regular wages, with nothing but "tips" to depend on.

Moreover, notwithstanding that he was familiar with poor Howland's trial and conviction, he was altogether obtuse or indifferent as to his own culpability in accepting Burley's bribe to keep off the witness stand.

However, partly through fear as to the consequences, but chiefly in virtue of the twenty dollars per week until wanted, which Eleanor had authorized to guarantee him, he had at last been brought to terms.

"Are you sure you have the man securely?" asked Eleanor, when Spender had about finished.

"Perfectly, my dear cousin," was the confident reply. "Jimpson, my young detective friend, was intending to remain at the resort for two months, with his wife and little girl, and he readily agreed to change his quarters at once to the Shoreside. He is as sharp as a ferret, and watchful as a bat, and will scarcely have his eye off the fellow till wanted. I think it will be absolutely impossible for the fellow either to communicate with Burley or give us the slip, even if there were any danger of his intending such a thing, now that he is so nicely fixed, which I do not for a moment apprehend."

"And what can this Kennedy testify to?"

"Not quite so much as your captive can, perhaps, but quite enough in corroboration of his testimony. He was peeping through the halfajar door, instead of over the partition, and consequently only saw a paper written upon with a fountain pen and passed to Howland by Burley, without knowing whether it was a bank-check or not."

"That ought to be enough."

"Well, I should say so! If you will permit me the use of a vulgar but very expressive slang word, my dear cousin, we are *hunk-away* up! Ah, that fountain pen! Though there was a somewhat despairing hiatus, our entire luck has hinged upon that discovery, that glorious find."

"And that was Florine's."

"True. Perhaps I have been wrong in suspecting the girl's fidelity."

"I feel sure of it."

"Still, she had many secret interviews with Burley, as I am quite certain."

"So am I, though I have never let her know. But I am sure—I feel confident—that it has been in my interests, and to delude him."

"I hope so."

"But enough of this!" with an impatient, dismissive gesture. "Now, Hugh Spender, the use to which we are to put these materials, and how soon?"

"Let me think," and the lawyer knitted his brows.

"Don't forget," she eagerly interposed, "that but a dozen or more days remain of the month in which I promised—my husband his exoneration and freedom!"

"Oh," slowly, "it can be managed in that time—I think."

"It must—it shall be!"

"Yes, yes. You see, the judge before whom he was tried is now off on his vacation, and such of the courts as are not closed are now in the midst of their midsummer apathy and dullness. However, this is a Tuesday?"

"Yes."

"Judge B—— is doubtless fishing among the Thousand Islands, his usual summer haunt. I shall communicate with him at once—to-night. It will have to be by letter, inasmuch as the explanation must be both thorough and urgent to fetch him promptly."

"Let it be by telegraph, then. You know I am regardless of the expense."

"It will cost two or three hundred dollars at least to telegraph the whole story."

"What do I care?" half-furiously. "Hugh Spender, how dare you to suggest an economy to me when even an added hour of Charles Howland's incarceration is at stake?"

"Well, well," rising, "I shall attend to it immediately. The telegraph ought to bring him back by Friday."

"Three whole days! an age! Is there no other judge on duty who would answer our purpose?"

"Not equally as well."

She heaved a sigh, and then arose to see him out with her accustomed energy.

"Good-night, then. Come and see me, or send word, some time to-morrow. But wait! Shall our yachting excursion with Burley on Thursday hold?"

"By all means, should he have the gall to keep to it. Better keep him lulled and dangling till the last moment."

"Good-night, Cousin Hugh."

The next morning John Burley called, looking anxious and perturbed, notwithstanding his dissimulating powers, which were exceptional.

"I am going to take the liberty of asking you a question, which you may possibly deem an impertinently intrusive one," were his first words after the exchange of the customary commonplaces, during which Eleanor was careful to dissimulate on her own part, to the extent of appearing especially good-natured.

She smiled.

"Well," she replied, "you can risk it, if you see fit, Mr. Burley."

"How long since you last saw your detective acquaintance, Major Falconbridge?"

"Oh, I don't mind indulging you with an answer there. Not for days; he is in fact no longer in the city."

"No longer in the city?"

"No; and, furthermore, I have reason to believe that he will not see or communicate with me for several days to come."

He had never had any reason to doubt her veracity, especially in response to a direct question; nor could be do so now, with that nobly beautiful and truthful, but self-contained, face calmly looking into his.

From the instant expression of relief that came into his own countenance, she perceived that his sole apprehension must have been as to her knowledge of his encounter with the detective's Double on the preceding day, and that he could not as yet have missed anything out of his oilskin-covered pocketbook, and this tended to increase her own self-satisfaction.

"I—I merely asked out of an overpowering curiosity," he stammered. "I do hope you will pardon it, Miss—Eleanor!" with a pleading look out of his passionate and really handsome eyes."

"It is not so much to pardon, Mr. Burley," ignoring or without resenting the "Miss Eleanor" presumption, whereat he was immensely pleased.

"You are not forgetting our excursion for Thursday, I hope?"

"I shouldn't be likely to, being a capital sailor, and with not a smell of salt-water as yet this season."

"Oh, if the fine weather only holds, we shall have a splendid time! We ought to be able to go half-way to New London and back for the day's jaunt. The Fearnought is in just perfect condition, and excellently manned. With perhaps but one exception, I don't believe there is a sloop-yacht in any of the fleets that can beat her."

"What is the exception?"

"The Ganymede—and for sale too, I understand."

"Well, I really hope we shall all have a fine time, Mr. Burley."

She said this so heartily that Burley, just then on the point of going, seized both her hands and kissed them; and then hurried away with a bounding heart, after perceiving that she had not resented the freedom by more than a comparatively slight frown—a joyfully encouraging omen, as he thought.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FLORINE RATHER SURPRISES HER MISTRESS.
THE following day, a Wednesday, passed without any other noteworthy incident than a call from Hugh Spender, to say that he had succeeded in locating Judge B — at the island of St. Pierre, on the St. Lawrence, whither the long dispatch which had been telegraphed him on the preceding night at the nearest station, twenty miles away, would probably reach him in the morning, so that an answer ought to be looked for on the forthcoming night.

Very early next morning, both Eleanor and Miss Bigbee were busying themselves preparing for the yachting trip, for a start from an anchorage at the East River foot of Thirty-fourth street, at eight o'clock had been determined on in order to take advantage of the outgoing tide.

Florine was to accompany her mistress, and was therefore busy between times with her own toilette while helping Eleanor with hers.

But something fitfully *distracte* and troubled in the girl's manner, altogether foreign in her accustomed sprightliness of disposition, had attracted Eleanor's attention from the very first this morning.

More than once she had bungled oddly in her services, while once or twice Eleanor caught a wistful, all but tearful suggestion in the young woman's gaze, as if she might be anxious to say something, and was yet withheld by some overpowering sense of fear or shame.

"What is the matter with you to-day, Florine?" Eleanor at last impatiently exclaimed over a fresh piece of unaccountable clumsiness. "Are you bewitched, or beside yourself?"

The girl abruptly finished lacing up her mistress's rose-colored corset, upon which she had been engaged, and faced her with listlessly hanging arms and a face in which the rich color swiftly came and went under the perfect tissues of her perfect blonde skin.

She herself was but half-dressed, to the revelation of a form that was only exceeded by Eleanor's own in statuesque grace and beauty, and mistress and maid were about of the same age.

"Oh, ma'mselle!" Florine nerved herself to begin; "please, may I lock the door first, so that Miss Bigbee cannot be rushing out and in with her inflated chatter?"

"Certainly," wonderingly.

Having locked the door, Florine completed Eleanor's astonishment by throwing herself on her knees before her, clasping her hands and bursting into a tempest of tears.

Their genuineness was not to be doubted, though Florine was no more given to such weaknesses than was her mistress.

"Bless me," cried Miss Sherwood; "what is the meaning of this?"

"Oh, ma'mselle!" sobbed the girl, whose heart was in the right place, for all her vanity and artificiality, "I have been a cheat, a hypocrite, a traitress, and you always so noble, so good to me! Throw me out, trample me under foot! nothing is too harsh for my deserts. But don't, ma'mselle, do not go on the yachting excursion to-day!"

"What?"

"Do not, I implore you, ma'mselle!"

"But why not?"

"It is a plot—a vile scheme of Monsieur Juan's!"

"Who is Monsieur Juan?"

"Monsieur Burley."

"Oh, yes."

"Do not go, ma'mselle, do not, I beseech."

"But explain to me, you ridiculous little goose!"

"He will carry you off, and me too. It is a plot of his. He thinks me in his interests—to be in love with him—and he has intrusted me with his secret. The officers and part of the crew are new men—Spaniards, in his interests. He will first kill Mr. Spender, or set him on shore. Then he will go to Newport to kidnap Monsieur Le Colonel. Then it is, Ho, for blue water! as he calls it. After he has taken you to the Canaries, and forced you to marry him, he will return here to secure your fortune. After that, he and I are to run off together and enjoy it in foreign lands!"

All this was poured forth with a passionate, contrite incoherence of utterance which no attempt has been made to reproduce.

But the astounded Eleanor mastered its substance as given above, and she could not doubt the truth of what she heard.

But she acted with her accustomed energy and presence of mind.

"Come to me, my poor Florine!" she said, raising the sobbing girl and kissing her. "You are, at least, a good, devoted girl to make a clean breast of it, even thus late in the day. And did you think I suspected nothing of that man's machinations in connection with you? Silly Florine! But there is still time to spare; so sit here by my side, with my arm around you, and tell me the whole story from beginning to end."

Florine obeyed, without the slightest reservation, and not sparing herself in any particular.

"I wouldn't condemn myself so absolutely, ma'mselle," she sobbed, in conclusion, "if I had not taken the villain's money. And I let him

give me dresses, and make me other presents, too."

"Hush! do not cry any more. I wish you to answer some questions."

"Yes, dear ma'mselle!"

"You did not and really do not care for this man, then?"

"Care for him? the *scelerat!* I hate and loathe him. And yet there is something so strange in his eyes, and—how shall I express it, ma'mselle?—at times he flattered my imagination so that I half-believed him, and hardly knew whether I should assent to take part in his iniquitous schemes."

"You half-believed he loved you?" repeated Eleanor.

"Only at times, ma'mselle, when his burning eyes and romantic words bewitched me for a little space."

"And you don't believe that now?"

"What a question! I never really believed it. As if I could not penetrate his trick! It was all of a piece to secure my secret assistance as against you, in spying upon you, and telling him your affairs. But indeed, indeed, I never did, even while pretending to assent—I swear it! But it is you he really loves, ma'mselle."

Eleanor laughed incredulously.

"Ah, but it is true, ma'mselle! He loves you as a cataract would the chasm into which it thunders and falls—as a volcano, an earthquake!"

"Pish! my money, you mean?"

"Ma'mselle, it is not so," earnestly. "Vile as he is, it is yourself. I do believe that, were you destitute of fortune, his passion would be none the less ungovernable and desperate."

Perverseness, or inscrutability, of woman! Much as Eleanor Sherwood detested this man, and, with all her nobleness, it was with a positive feeling of satisfaction, or, at least, an agreeableness to her pride, that she at last believed that it was herself, and not her fortune, which prompted his admiration.

"Well, well, my dear," she said, rising briskly, "we lose time, and there is quite enough of this. Bestir yourself now, or we shall keep the Fearnought waiting. And there is Aunt Jerusha knocking at the door again."

Florine also arose, but in supreme astonishment.

"The Fearnought!" she repeated. "Surely ma'mselle doesn't mean to say she is *going*?"

"Of course, I am going! What do you take me for? Leave it all to me; and be very careful that you don't betray this knowledge of mine to John Burley. Forewarned, forearmed! Now unlock that door."

Florine obeyed, and then mechanically went on with her preparations, while Miss Bigbee strode into the room fully equipped for the trip—panoplied for the fray, you might have said, her costume was so fearfully and wonderfully made, and it topped her grim head and hung around her bean-pole of a frame in such awesome folds.

Particularization will not be attempted, but she suggested nothing so much as one of "them terrible females" that cornered Artemus Ward at the Woman's Rights Convention of thirty years ago.

"I am ready, my loves!" exclaimed the championess, with a martial wave of her parasol, that was larger than an umbrella, with a stock suggestive of an Irishman's blackthorn stick. "Come; don't imitate our tyrants, the men, in the vice of procrastination."

"In one minute, aunt," replied Eleanor, now fully dressed in an exquisite sailor suit, and before her mirror for the last time. "Florine, fasten on to that bundle. Never mind what is in it."

Spender was promptly on hand after breakfast to escort them, and by eight o'clock they were on board the Fearnought.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ON BOARD THE FEARNUGHT.

THE Fearnought was a very large and very swift sloop yacht, of superb proportions, which had very seldom been beaten in the numerous regattas in which she had sailed.

As she was slipping up the river, with the early morning mists still clinging to or lightly brushing the water, like aerial cloud-phantoms, shod with wool, Eleanor, after expressing her delight with the fresh fine weather, remarked to Burley, who was standing at her side, on the number of strange faces she noted among the officers and men.

"Yes," was the reply, "Some of the old ones had got so neglectful that, as your father had kindly given me *carte blanche*, I ventured upon considerable changes."

"I used to know all the officers and men by name, and some of them quite intimately. The new ones are all foreigners, are they not?"

"No more than I, Miss Eleanor"—"Miss Eleanor" again, quite easily now, and still unresented—replied Burley, with just a suspicion of uneasiness in his laugh, "they are Creoles, or West Indians, and capital navigators. I suppose you will hardly blame me for the preferences in favor of my compatriots, everything else being equal?"

"Let me introduce you to the commander and

sailing-master. They are very agreeable fellows."

"No, thank you—at least not just now. Some how or another, I don't exactly take to them." With a dazzling smile for himself, whose equivocality he still could not perceive.

"I say, Burley," called out Hugh Spender, who was very genial with him, though by this time fully informed as to the projected plot, and who was pointing out shore objects of interest to Miss Bigbee and Florine, "this is a fine racing wind we are having."

"Couldn't be better," was the reply. "And the best of it is that, according to the civil service weather report, it will shift in the early afternoon so that we shall still have it with us on our return."

"Oho! how far shall you run up?"

"To Sachem's Head, off Guilford."

"Humph!" And at the same time Eleanor gave her cousin a cautioning glance.

According to the details which Florine had furnished, subsequent to her first revelation, this alleged turning point was where the mask would be dropped, and the plot betray itself.

At this juncture they were passing Astoria in whose cove a fine sloop-yacht, about as large as the Fearnought, was rocking lazily at anchor, and whose beauty drew forth an exclamation from both Miss Bigbee and Florine.

"There's a vessel!" cried the former, shaking her parasol enthusiastically. "How she must walk the life like a thing of water, when sheeted to the lightning's breath! and who would not move the monarch of her pimpled deck?" [Though not unaccustomed to "orate," Aunt Jerusha either never could or never would get her quotations straight.] "And oh, if woman only had a show on the waving bound, no less than man, the sailor-tyrant, who can only be profane, guzzle grog, and poison the pulsing crystal with tobacco-juice!"

"What yacht is it?" Eleanor, the better to control her risibles, asked of Burley, who remained as grave as a hangman, though both Spender and Florine had had to skip behind the companionway coping to explode in private.

"The Ganymede, Miss Eleanor."

"Ah!" eying the anchored yacht with fresh interest; "the sloop you mentioned as being the only one that could outsail the Fearnought?"

"Yes; a splendid craft!"

"And for sale, too, I think you said. Dear me! I can't see how any one could part with a yacht, unless upon the direst pecuniary compulsion, or how, in that case it should long remain unpurchased."

Burley smiled.

"Both contingencies are accounted for, Miss Eleanor," he replied. "The Ganymede belongs to the estate of Mr. A——, a rich broker and sea-lover, but recently dead; and she remains unsold because the executors, through their ignorance in such matters, place such an absurdly high price on her."

"What price?" she asked curiously.

"Twenty thousand dollars—and for a sloop-yacht six years old, at that!"

"Well, I don't know. I have heard papa say that the Fearnought cost sixteen thousand to build, when labor and materials must have been cheaper than they are now, I should judge. And if I wanted a yacht for my own individual pleasure—wanted it real bad, you know," with a laugh—"I don't think I should hesitate, or do much haggling, about paying the price demanded for that beauty."

"But it would be more than she is actually worth."

"No matter," indifferently. "I wouldn't mind being overreached to the tune of a thousand or two for the sake of gratifying my fad."

"You are very rich," sentimentally. "How delightful it must be to have riches without limit—to be so very rich, Miss Eleanor."

Miss Sherwood's individual fortune was estimated at rather more than a million.

"Not always, it is said," she carelessly answered. "Would you like to be so, Mr. Burley?"

"Only on one condition," and he looked at her intently.

"A condition?" before she could check herself, or think to what it might lead.

"Yes," in a low, thrilling voice; "that with wealth I could have the love of the woman of my heart's adoration—which I would accept just as gladly in poverty as in opulence—and that woman," wildly—"nay, you shall hear me out, Eleanor—is yourself!"

"Indeed!" coldly. "Well, suppose we change the subject, sir."

He seemed to come out of a sort of trance. Then with a forced laugh, he was quickly at his ease again, and began chatting indifferently on various topics.

In the mean time, the Fearnought, bending gracefully before the wind, with every stitch of her enormous spread of canvas drawing to perfection, was slipping into the neck of the Sound as if instinct with the very spirit of grace and speed.

By noon they were within fifteen miles of Sachem Head, and then, dinner being nearly ready, the steward thrust his head and shoulders

up out of the companionway, to look inquiringly at Burley, who at once went below with him.

This was the first opportunity Spender had had to speak with Eleanor, and he was not slow to improve it.

"It is true," he said, briefly. "I have nosed around everywhere, and talked with such of the old hands that remain—rather more than two-thirds. The yacht is thoroughly provisioned and watered for a long voyage."

"What are our chances?"

"Excellent, barring a surprise. Not one of the old hands are in the conspiracy, and will rally about us if called upon at the proper moment."

"Is there a chest of arms?"

"Yes; that is just before the mast. But I have secured and secreted six loaded revolvers from your father's old cabin (you remember his fondness for cracking away at the sharks and porpoises) which I do not think will be missed. I shall find an opportunity to arm as many of the most likely-seeming of the old hands with them, and have them in readiness to surround and stand guard over the arms-chest at the given signal."

"That will do. I will attend to my part. Be careful."

He had time to slip over to where Miss Bigbee was sitting, and begin an animated conversation with her, as the steward (a Cuban newly engaged) came on deck to announce that dinner was ready.

Burley quickly followed, begging to be Eleanor's escort, which was smilingly assented to.

Then they all went down to a most excellent repast in the saloon, which was also partaken of by the commander and sailing-master, two well-spoken Creoles who were introduced as Mr. Gando and Mr. Bertazzo by name.

But Eleanor's plan of attending to her part in the forthcoming drama was somewhat modified by a freak of chance, that was not exactly conducive to her comfort.

Soon after dinner, when the fateful Sachem's Head was still five miles away, she was sitting with her party, including Burley himself, partly on the port taffrail, busily thinking, in the pauses of the lively conversation that was going on, what excuse she should make for going below into her own cabin, or the one she had always occupied when on sail with her father, when there was a sudden lurch of the vessel that staggered them all.

As for Nelly herself, she toppled back, gave a sharp cry, and was on the instant floundering in the sea.

"Woman overboard!" instantly roared Burley, with rare presence of mind. "Fetch the yacht about!"

And then, tearing off his jacket, he was overboard after her like a shot.

CHAPTER XXV.

BAFFLED.

Now this was all very gallant, and all that, but Eleanor, who was a capital swimmer, and, after the first shock of her ducking had passed, had struck out after the yacht with long, easy strokes, was not particularly pleased with the assistance so promptly afforded.

However, churlishness under the circumstances would not do, and as Burley swam to her, she permitted him to support her, as a matter of form, until the boat, which had been promptly lowered, picked them both up.

As it was, a double dousing was the only inconvenience suffered, and the weather was warm; while, barring a little shriek from Florine, and a tremendous screech from Aunt Jerusha, even the excitement over the incident on the yacht was subdued and temporary.

"*Mon Dieu*, how unfortunate!" exclaimed Florine, as her mistress was lifted on board, decidedly damp but smiling; "and that perfectly-fitting sailor suit, too. Oh, ma'm'selle!"

"Tyrants, misnamed our lords—parodies upon Nature's handiwork!" vociferated Miss Bigbee, pounding the rail with her parachute-like parasol, and addressing either the unoffending elements or the crew of the Fearnaut collective-ly, it was hard to tell which; "you call yourselves *men* (our masters—lords of creation—ha, ha!) and permit such an outrage on our sex to happen?"

"Nonsense, aunt!" cried Eleanor, half-provoked, "if you were a man yourself, you would probably make less noise. Florine, help me to my cabin; and I shall perhaps have to lie down an hour or two." And, as she disappeared down the companion with her maid, she exchanged a glance with Hugh Spender, besides catching a glimpse of a rocky but rounded headland, now but two miles away on the port bow, which she felt sure must be Sachem's Head.

In spite of his dripping predicament, Burley's eyes had glistened at her parting words, an incident which was not lost upon the lawyer.

Nothing could better suit the plotting rascal than to have her below, and perhaps asleep, at the critical moment.

Miss Bigbee also followed Eleanor below, but presently returned to the deck, looking grave and subdued, if not a little uneasy.

Twenty minutes later, when the yacht was fully abeam of the headland, with no signs of rounding to for the return trip, Hugh Spender called out to Burley, whose blue flannel suit had by this time dried on his back:

"I say, Burley, isn't yonder Sachem's Head?"

Burley was standing with his back to the companion, looking forward, and being expectantly observed by the commander, the sailing-master and a number of the foreigners among the crew.

"Yes, it is," he replied, cynically.

"Why don't you round to, then," indifferent, "according to arrangements?"

"Friends to the front!" suddenly shouted the Creole. "Seize the arms-chest, and stand to!"

"Not quite, Mr. Burley!" At the same instant observed a cold, metallic voice directly behind him.

He had already reached for his revolver, and partly turned with a start to find himself confronted by the Falcon Detective's Double, and to have the muzzle of a similar weapon clapped to his ear.

"Falconbridge!" he gasped; "you here?"

"Yes, and as a stowaway no longer. Take in the situation now, and see what you think of it, Mr. Would-be-Kidnapper-and-Nineteenth-Century-Buccaneer."

The baffled scoundrel did so in a dazed, reeling way.

This is what he saw:

Six of the old hands, resolutely surrounding the arms-chest, and as many leveled revolvers keeping at bay the dozen or more West Indian hands who, at Burley's word of command, had made a simultaneous rush. Hugh Spender, with his revolver at the ear of the commander, Mr. Gando, standing no less baffled and dazed than Burley himself.

Bertazzo, the sailing-master, though, who was standing somewhat aft, still retained his presence of mind, a look of quiet desperation in his swarthy face.

"Creoles to the front!" he cried, whipping out his revolver. "Caramba! would you thus allow a mere handful of *Americanos*—"

"Now you subside, mister!" sneeringly interrupted a shrill voice behind him, while a blow from Miss Bigbee's mammoth parasol knocked the weapon out of his hand and caused his arm to drop to his side as if a telegraph pole had fallen afoul of it. "What, monster! you'd be a lord of creation *all* the time, would you? Not if Jerusha Bigbee knows it—Ha, ha!" And the blows began to rain on his head and shoulders with a fury that made him glad enough to scuttle away under the reach of the companionway coping in sheer self-defense.

"You perhaps are alive to the fact, Senor Juan Borleo," coldly continued the detective's Double, "that your cowardly plot is done up. Give up your revolver this instant, or I shall be under the unpleasant necessity of blowing out your brains—and the deck freshly hollystoned at that."

Burley sullenly obeyed; his two chief confederates were likewise disarmed, and then Spender made a brief speech of explanation to the Americans of the crew, who lost no time in driving their Creole messmates down into the forecastle, and putting them under guard there.

The plot had been nipped in the bud, almost before it could show a pink suggestion of bloom from underneath its concealing sheath.

A soft little laugh caused the defeated head scoundrel to turn again, and he saw Florine, with a mocking smile on her pretty lips.

"*Mon Dieu*! my dear Monsieur Juan," she exclaimed, with mock deprecation, "I really had to give you away. What! to carry poor mademoiselle off to the Canary Islands, just after jumping into the water after her, and she asleep in her cabin, to boot? Altogether out of the question! My friend, I have a conscience."

He gave her a terrible look, but made no reply.

But the sublime impudence of the man, not to call it his presence of mind, was quickly to the fore.

"What the deuce does it all mean?" he exclaimed, a moment later. "Plot? there was no plot. I was merely about to give a little exhibition, showing how the yacht might be defended on short notice—against mutineers, or perhaps Chinese pirates."

"It is true!" eagerly seconded Gando.

Bertazzo stuck his head out from under the coping, probably with intention of adding his supporting testimony to the same effect, when a fresh whack from the parasol, together with an emphatic, "No you don't, you crushed monster!" from Aunt Jerusha, who maintained her guard, caused him to duck it back again.

"Tell all that rot to the marines—if there are any," Spender took it upon himself to retort. "Major Falconbridge, had we not better accompany Miss Sherwood to the shore, and return to the city by rail?"

"And leave her father's yacht in the hands of these swarthy rogues!" was the Double's response. "Not if I know it. I shall take command for the time being."

This was accordingly done, there still remaining enough of a crew to work the yacht at a pinch.

Five minutes later she had made the turn, and was sheeting homeward before the wind, which had shifted opportunely and was blowing almost a gale.

The return trip was accomplished without incident, and the Fearnaut placed in temporary charge of an honest American who had been her master's mate, though no arrests were made.

CHAPTER XXVI.

BURLEY'S LAST CARD.

In the afternoon of the following day, which was a Friday, Hugh Spender had just announced a piece of highly-agreeable news to Eleanor, in the smaller drawing-room of her elegant home, with which we are already familiar, when there was a violent ringing of the doorbell.

The next moment Colonel Sherwood surprised them by entering, in a state of considerable excitement, closely followed by Burley, who was composed and sinister.

"My dear girl," the colonel began, "a dispatch from our friend, Mr. Burley, here, has brought me home quite unexpectedly. You see, that secret of my past which he possesses—" Here for the first time he perceived Spender's presence, and hesitated.

"Speak right out, father," said Eleanor, encouragingly. "Mr. Spender—Cousin Hugh, you know—is in my most intimate confidence."

But Colonel Sherwood's confusion rather increased than diminished, while Burley smiled sardonically.

"Suppose you let me help out, father," continued the young lady.

"Well, well, my dear; that is—"

She silenced him with an easy gesture.

"This is how the case stands," she continued. "You still imagine yourself in this gentleman's power, and he has sent for you, with the avowed threat of publishing what he deems would be your business disgrace, unless you can persuade me to engage myself to become his wife?"

The colonel coughed and colored, while Burley laughed again.

"My dear Eleanor," the latter began, with an easy air of holding a winning hand, "you are singularly correct in your divination, and—"

"If you address her with that familiarity again," savagely interrupted the lawyer, "I will throw you out of the window!"

Burley bit his lip and scowled, while Eleanor maintained her calmness, which was almost a smiling serenity.

"Don't interfere unnecessarily, Hugh," she cautioned. "The gentleman is only a little forgetful perhaps, just as he occasionally jumps to conclusions over-hastily—as in this illusion of his for instance, of possessing some secret of my father's past life that places him at his mercy!"

"Illusion!" sneered Burley. "There is no illusion about it. He is in my power!"

"By what evidence? And do you really imagine that your word would be of avail against my father's in Wall street?"

"Of course, I don't, Miss Sherwood; I am not quite such a fool. I have better evidence than hearsay."

"What sort of evidence have you against my father's reputation, sir?"

"The best of evidence—documentary; a letter of his own, confessing a crime of a quarter of a century ago."

"I do not believe you; and I challenge you to produce it!"

The Creole exultingly produced his oilskin-covered pocketbook.

But, on hastily examining its contents, a look of blank amazement, then of something like horror, came into his face.

He again looked over the papers, one by one, even examining the interior of each, but with no better result.

"Gone!" he cried, hoarsely. "I have been robbed!"

"Hardly that," replied Eleanor, calmly. "When a serpent is deprived of its poison-bag, one is scarcely accused of *robbing* it. Father," producing a letter from her bosom, "here is the document in question. It is your property."

Colonel Sherwood stared bewilderedly, and then pounced upon the letter with a cry of delight.

After glancing at the writing, he tore it into a thousand pieces, scattered them on the floor, and all but danced on them with the enthusiasm of a boy, while glancing exultingly at Burley.

Baffled, defeated at every point, the latter had staggered back with the face of a fiend.

"Stay, sir!" commanded Miss Sherwood, as he would have turned to go. "A fuller explanation is yet your due, and you shall have it."

He faced her mechanically, and with forced composure.

"You did me the honor of pretending to love me, I believe?"

"I pretended nothing!" he cried wildly. "I did and do love you—to distraction—to madness! Were you a beggar on the street, instead of the millionaire that you are—save only that you were none other than *yourself*—I would have still loved you to the same madness—as I am loving you at this moment, though with ruin in my life, despair in my heart!"

Eleanor remained silent a moment. There was no doubting the genuineness of those wild and burning words. No woman, as a rule, is perhaps averse to know herself the inspiration of an overwhelming passion in any man, under any circumstances, and Eleanor Sherwood was not an exception to the rule.

However, it required but the recurrence of Charles Howland's wrongs in her thoughts to sufficiently modify any gentleness or commiseration which this passionate avowal might have momentarily evoked.

"I am sorry for this," she said quietly. "But do you not remember my once hinting to you, or in your presence, that, even were my inclination otherwise, it would be impossible for me to marry any one?"

"Yes." And Colonel Sherwood, to whom the hint had been made more directly, also looked up interestedly.

"It would be impossible."

"I can't believe that," growled the Creole.

"Nevertheless, it would."

"Why?"

"Because I am already married."

He looked at her in blank incredulity, which was equally shared by her father.

"You—married—now?" hoarsely exclaimed Burley.

"Yes."

"Since when?"

"Since the night preceding Charles Howland's departure for State Prison—where you are speedily to take his place!" with passing vehemence—"when I was wedded to him in his Tombs prison cell. The Reverend Mr. — performed the ceremony. My cousin, Hugh Spender here, with a male friend, was among the witnesses. The certificate is in my bosom."

Burley suddenly placed his hand on his heart, and gave a strange, inarticulate cry, like that of a wounded animal.

Then he was once more possessed of an outward calmness, in which, however, there was something frightful.

"Was Florine aware of this?" he asked, in the same strained huskiness.

"She was another of the witnesses."

A spasm of impotent fury passed over his dark face, and his hands clutched convulsively, but that was all.

"You have not only broken my heart," he said, with terrible simplicity, "you have slain it. Beware! it is not well to incur the hatred, the remorselessness, of such a man as I." And then he was gone.

It was probably well for Florine Duprez that she was not on view as he slipped like a phantom through the hall, and thence out of doors.

Colonel Sherwood, who had dropped bewilderedly into the first chair at hand, turned a look of half-stupid inquiry on his daughter and her cousin.

"It is all true, papa!" cried Eleanor, joyfully. "Tell him the rest, Cousin Hugh."

"The missing witnesses that were necessary to prove Charles Howland's innocence are producible, sir," Hugh gravely exclaimed. "Judge B—, fully acquainted with the facts, arrived in the city from his vacation tour yesterday. He has already placed the matter before the governor and the Supreme Court. Howland should be a free man, by an executive order, by to-morrow morning, if not sooner. It is a mere preliminary to the mere formality of reopening his case, in the form of a new trial—which may also take place to-morrow—which can but result in the announcement of his innocence and the vindication of his good name within a couple of hours. The prosecuting attorney has been acquainted with the newly-discovered facts, and will decline to resume the prosecution to follow. An order of arrest for John Burley, on the charges of perjury, conspiracy and subornation of witnesses, will follow, as a matter of course. But had it not better be obtained at once—I can manage it—lest he should endeavor to escape?"

Colonel Sherwood had regained something of his powers of collected thought by the time the explanation was finished.

"Little danger of that as yet, I should say," he replied. "My bank offices were closed before we came up-town together, and the man's salary account is underdrawn by at least five hundred dollars. My bookkeeper told me so. To-morrow before the bank opens will be time enough."

Here there was a ring at the door-bell. The next moment a tall, bright-faced young man, whose appearance caused Eleanor to turn deadly pale at first, and then with a great ecstasy mantling her loveliness with its roseate expression, to spring to her feet with a sharp little cry, her hand to her heart, slowly entered the room.

Then she was somehow in her husband's arms.

Charles Howland had lost none of his bright, brave manliness by his brief State Prison experience, though it was accompanied by a tinge of melancholy that it might take years to efface.

Both Colonel Sherwood and Hugh Spender silently wrung the young man's hand, and then stole away, leaving the reunited ones to themselves.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"IN THE MORNING BY THE BRIGHT LIGHT."

THERE was an unusually joyful breakfast party in the charming morning room of Colonel Sherwood's charming Harlem residence on the following day.

In addition to Howland, who was already installed as one of the family, Hugh Spender was present.

Eleanor was the incarnation of bridal bliss; her young husband could already make himself generally agreeable, after his old-time wont, when he could manage to divert his attention from the happy and beautiful face at his side; Colonel Sherwood was himself in the highest of spirits; so was the lawyer; even Miss Bigbee had somewhat relaxed her Amazonian-Draconian rigor of intellectual mien; and Florine, who had begged permission to assist the waitress in her duties for that particular repast, was as pretty as a peony, and sprightly as a bird at mating.

It was even a happier meal than the dinner which had preceded it, when, naturally, Howland's first appearance in the family had been attended with more or less awkwardness or constraint.

But now all was freedom, sociability and ease.

In fact, the good feeling was being travestied in the servants' quarters, to which the romantic story of the prison marriage had already penetrated, and the occasional festive sounds that reached the saloon were permitted to pass without adverse comment, as might otherwise have been the case.

"Let 'em toot up a bit," jovially observed the colonel. "They've a right to be happy, as well as we, and the whole thing will be public sooner or later," with a wry face, as he thought of the club banterings in store for him. "However, I can stand it if you folks can," glancing comically at the couple.

"They say there is no honey without its gall," replied Eleanor, brightly. "Even if the saying should apply to honeymoons, in the shape of an unavoidable publicity, I think we get a little comfort out of her shining."

"I am quite sure I can," said Howland, the touch of sadness vanishing from his smile as he turned to her.

"Oh, publicity is nothing in New York," Spender observed, philosophically. "Where is there any romance that those ubiquitous imps, the reporters, do not get hold of—and mostly with no objection on the part of the participants therein."

"That is all very well, my dears," said the colonel, with a significant glance at the couple. "But look you, there is something else that must be amended by publicity—the social publicity of that which has heretofore been secret."

They understood that he referred to their extraordinary marriage, which he had already intimated should be celebrated by a grand wedding dinner or breakfast at an early date—and merely inclined their heads in assent.

"Marriage itself should be amended, Ezra Sherwood," at this juncture interposed Miss Bigbee, with the pugnacious calmness that seemed to be inseparable from her fourth cup of tea as at present. "In the existing state of society it is simply a barbarism—a ghastly relic of the despotism of man!"

"Oh, psbaw!" grumbled Sherwood, uneasily. But Hugh Spender was disposed to give the old girl a 'chance,' as he expressed it in his own consciousness.

"What would you substitute for the rites of Hymen, ma'm?" he genially inquired.

"Nothing," was the dogmatic response. "Hymen's all right—or his rights are—but they simply ought to be transposed, so to speak."

"In what way?"

"Woman, the true head of the family, ought to be the commanding figure before the altar, instead of as now—the pale, paling, trembling, subordinate, gasping vassal of despotic masculinity's tyrant will—his helot and his slave—the second fiddle in the orchestrian union!"

Eleanor burst into a laugh, while even Howland smiled, though Spender maintained his gravity.

"Still," he ventured to protest, in a timorous way, "isn't the bride at times a rather willing vassal, you know?"

"Does she know better than to be so?" scornfully. "Where is her proud pristine will that untold ages of base, cowardly oppression have crushed, ground, hammered, battered, trampled, plunked and smashed out of her? Answer me that, Mr. Spender."

"Well, they occasionally seem to have a little of it left, or a very close substitute for the volitional principle—at least in rare instances—you will surely acknowledge that, Miss Bigbee?"

She waved her fifth cup on high, and quaffed its contents as if it had been a goblet of wine—a stirrup-cup to her galloping fancy, as one might say.

"No, sir—never!" she all but shouted. "Will? Its ghost, its shadow, the phantom of her murdered individuality, her smothered instincts, her assassinated womanhood. Oh!" with a wild, banner-bearing enthusiasm, "when will they rise? It cannot be an inspired leader that they

require, for am not I here, sword in hand, cannon in my belt, shield over my broad breast, willing, eager for the trump to sound the onset? But alas, no!" with a noble dejection; "once a slave, always a slave. Too late, too late!"

"Oh, bosh, Jerusha!" the colonel snapped out again. "Finish off with the entire tea-pot at once, and give us a rest from this species of exhilaration. Or if you must have the whole earth, be content with a principality or two at a time."

"Exhilaration!" echoed the championess.

But at this moment the morning newspapers were brought to the colonel, and for the time being she subsided.

"Ah, just as I feared!" exclaimed Sherwood, rapidly scanning journal after journal with his practiced eye, while his coffee was growing cold. "Every one of 'em has its article on it a ready.

'A Prison Marriage'; 'A Novel Revelation'; 'A Fashionable and Wealthy Young Lady'—By Jupiter! I can't even stand the headlines."

"It will be forgotten in a week," interposed Spender. "Don't let it worry you a particle, sir."

"Well, I shall do my best."

"What can you expect of newspapers controlled by men?" squawked Miss Bigbee, rushing into the breach with freshened vigor.

"Hang 'em to the lamp-posts, dynamite 'em, give 'em fits! Shall we not inaugurate a new Reign of Terror, when our streets shall run red with masculine blood alone? Was it a god or a goddess of reason that planted the imperial red cap of democratic France upon her young brow? Answer me that! and if goddess, as it was, why a goddess, and not a god, if it was not an admission—torn from the bosom of the despotic sex—that woman is the superior, the bull's-eye and the queen? Where will I look for an answer?" triumphantly. "Echo answers, with her raven-croak, 'Nevermore!'

Colonel Sherwood made a movement as if to flee, but another diversion was caused by the re-entrance of the footman.

"Mr. Esty, sir," he announced.

"What! my bookkeeper here, at the bank-opening hour?"

"Yes, sir."

"Show him into the library; I have only to finish my coffee."

"If you please, sir—"

"Well?" in surprise.

"Young man says he must see you instantly. Very much agitated, sir."

"Agitated. Bring him in here, then."

This was done.

"Why, how now, Esty!" exclaimed the banker. "Nothing wrong, I hope?"

The intruder—a fine-looking young man, who had exchanged a pleasant word with Howland, after bowing modestly to the rest of the company, in spite of his agitation, which was painfully evident—made an effort to control himself.

"Yes, sir," he diffidently replied. "Very much wrong, I am sorry to say."

"Out with it, my man!"

"John Burley has robbed the safe, and is doubtless ere this well started for foreign parts in the Fearnaught!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BURLEY'S FLIGHT.

IMMEDIATE investigation of this stunning piece of intelligence proved its truth in every particular, together with certain other details.

Burley had taken the precaution of drawing the residue of his patrimony, about two thousand dollars, out of bank on the preceding day.

That he was the robber of Colonel Sherwood's safe there were conclusive evidences left behind. He had doubtless entered the offices on the following night, probably soon after receiving the finishing blow to his hopes at the Sherwood residence. The safe-door had been found wide open next morning; the receptacles gutted of their cash, in bills and specie, to the amount of twenty thousand dollars. As the locks had not been forced, it was evident that he had duplicate keys, which had doubtless been in his possession a long time, in preparation of such an attempt if deemed advisable.

Then inquiry at his lodgings elicited the information that he had all his effects removed several days before, in all probability to the yacht as a yet further preparative. His creatures had still remained in the responsible positions and among the crew, through Colonel Sherwood's dilatoriness in making an investigation, as urged to do by his daughter, when she had made him acquainted with the details of Burley's foiled conspiracy directly after the latter's last visit to the house.

As has been seen the yacht had already been provisioned for a long voyage.

All that Burley would have had to do was to step on board, give the order, and be off for the open sea.

This, on the requisite inquiries being made, proved to have been just what he had done, shortly before midnight, and the Fearnaught had subsequently been sighted and recognized blowing out through the Narrows before a stiff breeze.

She was doubtless by this time more than a

hundred miles distant on the broad, lonely seas, headed none could know whither, though it was strongly suspected that the fugitive criminal would at first make for his native Porto Rico, or some other of the West India islands with which he might be equally familiar.

Through "influence," that too potent factor in American courts and polities, Charles Howland's new trial was brought about on the following Monday.

Fortunately a jury was secured without any difficulty whatever.

His witnesses were at last produced, together with the testimony with respect to the fountain pen.

The district attorney declined to prosecute, and the trial, of less than four hours' duration, resulted in a unanimous verdict of acquittal.

Judge B— reviewed the remarkable case in all its bearings, and publicly expressed his profound regrets for the injustice which the accused had been compelled to suffer through conspiracy and the force of circumstances.

The district attorney added a few words in a similar strain.

Howland walked out of the court-room a free and stainless man.

As a matter of course, the order for Burley's arrest had been issued, even before this result was reached, but to what end? Since the news and particulars of his felonious escape were already in everybody's mouth or hearing.

"Father," Eleanor had said on the day previous to this, "the sloop yacht Ganymede, which I was told could beat the Fearnaught, is for sale."

"Yes."

"Can she beat the Fearnaught, papa?"

"The Ganymede? Bless you, yes, my dear; can outsail her any day, or anything afloat!"

"Is she ready for sea?"

"I believe so; with the exception of her crew."

"Poor A— had made ready for a long voyage in her to Norway, I believe, just before that unfortunate attack that carried him off."

"Father, I want you to attend to purchasing the Ganymede, and making her ready for me, without an hour's delay."

"You're in earnest?"

"Most gravely in earnest."

"What do you want with the Ganymede?"

"To overhaul the Fearnaught, and bring John Burley, otherwise Juan Borleo, to justice."

"Hallo!"

"That is it, papa. Charles and I might as well escape this dreadful publicity, besides spending our honeymoon in this way as in any other. Please don't delay."

"Good enough! But I understand A—'s executors are asking twenty thousand dollars for the craft."

"I believe I can draw a check for that amount, and more, too!"

"I should say so.—I only wish I could myself."

"Then obtain the refusal of the Ganymede for me on the spot, and attend to obtaining officers and a crew without delay. I would set sail within two days following upon my husband's acquittal, if possible. If you are very good, papa, you shall accompany us."

Colonel Sherwood had accordingly secured the yacht. After that he had been so fortunate as to engage for her, among others, such of his old officers and crew of the Fearnaught as Burley had so arbitrarily turned out of their employment, to make room for the creatures of his plot. The purchase money was paid; but twenty-four hours had been required for completing the provisioning of the vessel; and on the Wednesday morning following the acquittal everything was in readiness for the voyage of pursuit.

By noon that day the Ganymede set sail, the Fearnaught having thus had four full days the start.

The pursuer slipped through the Narrows before a stiff northwester, and headed away for the Caribbean.

Besides the bridal couple, there were on board as passengers, Florine Duprez, Miss Jerusha Bigbee, who had refused to remain behind, Colonel Sherwood, who had temporarily suspended his business, or what the rascality of the Creole had left of it, and Hugh Spender, who had gladly managed to avail himself of this opportunity for the only continuous vacation in which he had indulged himself in many years.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE PURSUIT.

The Ganymede proved herself worthy of her reputation.

Even a comparative tyro, with the knowledge of comparison to go by, could have perceived her superior sailing qualities to those of the Fearnaught, crack craft as the latter had been considered in her class.

Her spread of canvas was far greater; she flew over the waters like a veritable thing of life, and she was, moreover, a stancher vessel, more likely to outride a storm in safety than her rival.

"Oh, she's a daisy!" exclaimed Captain Tidewell, her master, on the second day out. "I used to think that the Fearnaught was little short

of perfect as a skimmer of the seas. But, bless your hearts! she was little better than a pilot-boat, compared with this beauty. Observe her freedom and ease as she fairly revels under the pressure of that immense mainsail, and without nosing under a particle. A daisy, my friends, a veritable paragon of the waves!"

On the fourth day out they were so fortunate as to communicate with a northward bound brig, that had seen and spoken the Fearnaught two days previously, and had been informed that her destination was Guayama, Porto Rico.

This was encouraging news, for it not only proved that they were not only indubitably on the fugitive's track, but gaining on her, and it moreover seemed to indicate no less conclusively that they were destined to overhaul her at Port au Prince, if not sooner.

On the morning of the following day, however, Eleanor appeared at the breakfast table looking uncommonly serious, if not positively out of sorts.

"Captain," she said, when Mr. Tidewell made his appearance, "I want you to change our course for Bermuda without delay."

Everybody looked up in surprise, except her husband and the officer addressed, the latter observing the speaker with a deeply interested air, after the first look of surprise had passed from his face.

"What can you be thinking of, my dear girl?" exclaimed Colonel Sherwood.

"Of a good many things, papa," was the reply, "but especially of having our course changed, as I have indicated."

As she spoke she kept her eyes fixed upon Captain Tidewell.

"Of course, Mrs. Howland's authority is indisputable on board her own yacht," said that gentleman, quietly. "But am I permitted to ask a few questions?"

"Any number of them, my dear captain," with her accustomed smile.

"I would first ask, then, why you decide to have me change our course?"

"Because John Burley came to and announced a similar decision with regard to the course of the Fearnaught at one o'clock this morning."

The general surprise was increased, as may well be imagined, though still with the exception of Eleanor's husband and the Ganymede's master.

The subject was apparently not wholly new to the former, and the officer simply maintained his quiet and growing interest therein.

"You perhaps became aware of this in a dream?" he said.

"I did," replied Eleanor. "Listen: Toward the close of my first sleep last night—for my best night's rest is usually divided into two distinct and nearly equal portions—I was suddenly involved in a confused whirl of strange and unintelligible dreams.

"Then there succeeded a calming, extricating sense of unity, and everything was distinct.

"I was on a vessel that I knew to be the Fearnaught, and I was somehow made aware that she must be a hundred and fifty miles due south of the Ganymede's position at that time.

"Bright starlight was overhead, a good breeze was blowing, and the vessel was scudding before it, headed south.

"I was near the wheel, at which a sailor stood motionless, pipe in mouth, attentive to his duty. Thoughtfully pacing the deck near at hand, back and forth, from one bulwark to the other, was John Burley, his arms folded, his chin bent on his breast.

"Suddenly rousing himself, he went to the companionway, and called down it: 'Gando, Gando! come up.'

"The Creole captain presently made his appearance, looking sleepy and irritable.

"I judge that we are now due west, or nearly due west from the Bermudas, Gando," said Burley.

"You are not out of your reckoning, Senor Borleo, was the reply.

"Now then is the time to change our course," continued Burley.

"What! you are still bent on making for Bermuda, instead of Guayama?"

"Of course, I am. What have I been telling these vessels we have spoken that our destination was Porto Rico for, save expressly to throw off of our scent any craft that may be in pursuit of us?"

"Your fears get the better of you," Gando replied, somewhat sneeringly. "The sea is wide, no vessel can be pursuing us, and we could not be tracked if there were."

"That is for me to judge, capitano."

"But—"

"Alter the ship's course!" cried Burley, peremptorily, and with a fierce oath, 'or I'll know the reason why!'

"Oh!" replied Gando, with sudden submissiveness, and a shrug of the shoulders; 'for that matter, I am your subordinate, Senor Borleo.'

"He gave the necessary order forthwith, and the course of the Fearnaught was changed accordingly.

"I still remained at Burley's side in my dream. And the strangest feature of the vision was that I knew I was there but in a dream. Never-

theless, I was possessed of an overpowering desire to make Burley in some way cognizant of my insubstantial presence.

"As he had come to a stand-still while resuming his thoughtful attitude, I went close up to him, or it seemed that I did, and whispered in his ear, but without his paying the slightest attention. Then it seemed that I fairly shouted his name, but still without producing the least effect.

"At last another thought occurred to me. Summoning all my dream individuality to my aid, so to speak, I whispered sharply in his own ear my own name, the one word, 'Eleanor!'

"This time it was a success. He gave a violent start, looked all about him in an alarmed way, but of course without seeing anything, which did not seem strange to me, notwithstanding that I could look down over my own person, so invisible to him, with the utmost realism and satisfaction.

"After resuming his burried pacings for a while, he grew more composed, and seated himself on the tafrail, over the phosphorescently sparkling but comparatively slow wake of the vessel, by reason of her having only just come about on her altered course.

"Another thought occurred to me, and going up to him again, in the mystery of my invisibility, I kissed into his ear these words: 'Falconbridge, the Falcon Detective! think you to escape his sleuthing pursuit by sea or land?'

"The effect in this case was greater than I had looked for.

"He started up with a sort of gasp, lost his balance, and fell overboard, yelling out with his accustomed presence of mind, however, 'Man overboard!' as he disappeared.

"I still remained a mere spectator of it all in my dream.

"The alarm was at once given, and, as I have said, the yacht was not going very fast just then.

"A boat was got out with such dispatch that Burley was rescued before he had drifted a dozen rods astern, where he was swimming gallantly.

"But just as they were lifting him over the gunwale, an enormous shark, with the water dripping in sheets of phosphorescent fire from its shining body, sprung entirely clear of the surface and snapped at him.

"There was a sharp cry, and when Burley was brought on board the yacht in a fainting condition, I learned from overhearing what the sailors said, that the shark had snapped off two fingers of his left hand.

"Then a mist seemed to envelop me, and I awoke in my cabin, with every feature of the dream photographed indelibly in my brain.

"I looked at my watch. It was five minutes past one. That is all."

This extraordinary narrative was listened to by all, with the interest which it so fairly challenged, with perhaps the single exception of the narrator's father, who had little respect for dreams, or for sentiment of any sort, for that matter, and who had seemed somewhat annoyed during the recital.

"Pish!" he fretted. "What does a dream amount to?"

"A revelation at times," replied Eleanor, quietly.

"This one shall certainly be accepted as such," said Captain Tidewell. "The course of the Ganymede shall be altered forthwith, Mrs. Howland; the more readily of my own part, permit me to say, inasmuch as from the very hour of our speaking that brig yesterday, I have felt convinced that the information vouchsafed to her by the Fearnaught fugitives was meant as a blind for such as might be in pursuit of them."

He then quitted the table for the deck, and returned to finish his breakfast with the gratifying announcement (for the young wife, at least), that the course had been changed to southwest by west for Bermuda, in accordance with her wishes."

"For my part," said Howland, as the repast proceeded, "I do believe in dreams, out of my own experience, and have no hesitation in saying so. This one of Nelly's impressed me wonderfully from the moment of her first telling it to me."

"I also believe in dreams, and in the revelation that may come to us in dreams," observed Tidewell, who turned out to be something of a mystic. "We are mysteries even to ourselves, and the material is the only insubstantiality in our composition—the spiritual is the one and all."

"I believe in 'em when they come true," said Miss Bigbee, with her nose in the air. "Now, for instance, I once dreamed that all the men in the universe came to me, repentant of their barbarous despotism over women in the ages past, and begging to place their sparkling diadem of imperial rule on my haughty brow, that I might condescend to straighten out things. Now that dream didn't come true."

"Is it possible?" grunted the colonel. "Maybe if you should try it again, Jerusha, particularly after a heavy supper, you might fetch up more satisfactorily."

"Well," Spender hastened to interpose, "if we should really succeed in capturing our ocean

fugitive, there will be an easy way to test the revelational truth of Mrs. Howland's dream to perfection. All we shall have to do will be to examine the fingers of his left hand—mean time hoping he was not permitted to bleed to death."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE STORM.

On the second day after the change of course there fell a calm, which lasted more than twenty-four hours, during which the superb yacht, at most times the very spirit of grace and speed, lay upon the glassy surface of the sea, slowly undulating along the mirror-like, scarcely perceptible swells, with no more progression than a dead or sleeping albatross.

"It can't last for any great length of time in this latitude," Tidewell reassured his passengers, as they moved restlessly about the decks, complaining of the heat which was intense. "It will break up in a storm, which I only hope will prove as brief as this calm will be."

His prediction proved correct.

At sunset of the third day out upon the new course, lead and slate colored clouds began unexpectedly to bank up the western horizon.

They rapidly deepened in hue, lightning played flickeringly in their bosom, and presently the attention of every one on deck was attracted by the singular phenomenon of a white, compact, ball-like cloud suddenly shooting high up in the sky from the edge of the cloud-bank.

"A white squall, eh, Tidewell?" asked Colonel Sherwood.

"As a starter, yes," replied the master; adding under his breath: "Pray Heaven it may not be the forerunner of a tornado!"

The yacht was in readiness a few minutes later when, with a few preliminary puffs, hot as from the jaws of a furnace, the squall swooped down upon her with the shriek of a million eagles.

The erstwhile glassy sea was torn into foam, and the Ganymede, though with nothing but her spritsail as a steadiest, went whirling away in the clutch of the blast like a chip, though still holding to the water like a trump.

Short chopping waves succeeded, and then, as the squall tore on, she seemed to feel her power, feathering the white-caps beautifully, the undaunted spirit of the terrible change.

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Florine, who had no love for the sea at its best, and who chanced to be standing alone at Captain Tidewell's elbow; "but shall we not be drowned, *mon capitaine?*"

He turned to her with a laugh. Thoughtful sober-sides as he was, he more than liked the girl's beauty and sprightliness.

"Not by a long shot, Miss Florine," he replied. "One or two of us ought to be saved, I fancy. What makes you think we may be drowned?"

"Oh, it is so frightfull! The land is much more agreeable, *mon ami*. But here, where everything may be upside down in a moment—"

At this juncture a sudden lurch of the yacht would have carried her off her feet but for the skipper catching her in his arms. He seemed well-content to keep her there, too, when at last—not with any violent or undue baste, however—she resumed her isolated grasp upon one of the stays, with an, "Ah, *Monsieur Capitaine*, you are so strong, you are so brave!" accompanied by a soft look of her pretty gray eyes.

"Don't mention it, my dear," he replied, feeling happy and confused. "I—I—you see, I rather like supporting you than otherwise."

Here his duties called him forward, and Miss Bigbee, who had sort of lashed herself in the lee of the deck-house but a short distance away, called peremptorily to Florine to come to her.

"Here, sit down beside me!" snapped the spinster; and as the girl demurely obeyed, she continued: "Have you no maiden modesty, no native queenliness, I want to know?"

"Oh, ma'm! what for?"

"I saw that—that man take you in his arms!" severely. "Don't dare to deny it, Florine!"

"But, ma'm, otherwise I might have pitched headlong."

"Ha! As if you didn't relinquish your grasp of the rope purposely!"

"Oh!"

"Don't talk to me!"

"But it is you that talk, ma'm. Besides, Monsieur le Capitaine is but one of *les monstres*, ma'm."

"Florine," dignifiedly, "men may be all monsters, but monsters are not equally disagreeable. And I am glad to be able to say that, from the many courtesies—I may say significant courtesies I have permitted Captain Tidewell to offer me, he is very creditable to the monster species."

"Oh, ma'm!" and in spite of her real terror of the storm, the young woman could hardly keep from laughing outright; "but then you are still attractive."

The squall blew itself out in twenty minutes.

But Tidewell's secret apprehensions were to be realized to the full. After a brief interval of comparative quiet, it was a regular tornado that succeeded it.

It came rushing down from the west with a preliminary roar, and as the dead darkness gathered upon the sea, the Ganymede was the

sport of such a tempest as she had never encountered before.

That was a night of terror for the women on board the Ganymede, and they passed it below in the saloon, without venturing to go to bed, lest they should be hurled out of their bunks by the violent pitchings of the yacht, which were nothing less than terrific.

The gentlemen kept them company after a bit, and even made the pretense of starting a game of cards, but it was easy to perceive that their efforts at encouragement were more or less forced.

The tempest seemed to increase, rather than diminish, as the anxious hours wore away, and though the yacht seemed to be holding her own bravely, at last it was only by lying at full length along the divans that the inmates of the saloon could keep from being dashed about, to the imminent danger of life or limb.

Affairs were in this discouraging condition toward morning when Tidewell came down to say that all was well.

Tidewell was a self-contained, handsome man of middle age, bronzed, black-haired, black-bearded, manly, every inch a sailor, and very much of a gentleman.

As he opened the door of the saloon, Miss Bigbee managed to pitch off the sofa upon which she had been lying in such a way as to land squarely—or angularly, for that matter—in his arms.

"Save me!" she screeched, half-garrotting him with her bony arms, and wildly kissing him. "You won't let me drown, Captain Tidewell, will you? Oh, say that you won't!"

"Well, not if I can help it, you know," he replied, somewhat summarily releasing himself. "There you are, ma'm; and you must try to brace up," and he restored her to her lounge with more briskness than ceremony.

The next instant, by an odd coincidence, he had Florine in his arms, and perhaps a little unnecessarily so perhaps, inasmuch as she had merely rolled off the opposite divan upon the soft carpet of the saloon floor.

"You shameless French hussy!" spitefully screamed Aunt Jerusha; "let go that poor gentleman's neck! Do you want to choke him to death?"

"*Mon Dieu, ma'm!*" spirituelly replied the maid; "I am not touching the gentleman's neck," which was the truth, the embrace, if any, being wholly on the part of the skipper himself. "I can leave the choking task to others." With a gracious smile as she in turn was restored to her divan, and with very much gentleness.

Eleanor burst into a scream of amused laughter; she was joined in it by every one else, saving only Miss Bigbee; and for the first time, as Captain Tidewell beat a confused retreat, something like cheerfulness was resumed since the first assault of the tornado.

CHAPTER XXXI.

DEBRIS.

A LITTLE later on word was sent down to the saloon that the storm was slowly but surely abating.

This comforting assurance soon became patent to the dullest apprehension; but it was rather a wo-begone group that sat down to the eight o'clock breakfast which the steward managed to serve after a fashion.

"Yachting in tornadoes is a thing I never particularly admired," observed Colonel Sherwood, pouring a little brandy in his coffee. "And I'm an old yachtman at that."

"You mustn't mind such trifles, papa," cried Eleanor, who alone of the women had managed to spruce and brace herself up not a little, though Florine was not far behind her young mistress in this regard. "A storm at sea is a magnificient spectacle—viewed from the bluff at Long Branch, for instance."

"I should say so!"

And then both Howland and Spencer burst into a laugh as Aunt Jerusha passed her cup to the steward for a third refilling with a look of mingled sternness and humility that would have excited the risibles of an owl.

"I really don't see what you are laughing at!" she snapped out, while adjusting her false front, which was awry, and recovering her spectacles from a dangling poise over her left ear. "However, monkeys laugh at anything. And the battle ain't to the strong alone—no nor to the artfully cunning or contriving, neither!" with a spiteful glance of significance at Florine, who sat directly opposite her.

"No, ma'm," replied the maid, demurely (Florine had been on much of an equality with the others while on board), and without permitting the privilege to turn her shrewd little head in the least; "it must be to our fearless champions against those monsters, the men."

"You can all safely come on deck in an hour," interposed Tidewell, rising after having eaten but little. "The sea is fast going down."

When they did go up they found him, in company with his second in command, earnestly examining some object with his telescope.

The sea was still very wild, though fast subsiding, with the brilliant semi-tropical sunshine already beginning to dissipate the cloud-rack.

"What is it, captain?" asked Eleanor, who was in lead of the newly-appearing group.

"Something like a boat, ma'm, though a mere speck as yet," replied Tidewell, with the glass still leveled, though slightly shifting its bearings as he spoke. "But just to the south of it yonder is something yet more puzzling."

"What is that?"

"Something very like an island, and yet there is none down on the chart."

"What is our position?" inquired Sherwood.

"Haven't taken the sun yet, sir; but we ought to be due west of Bermuda a matter of a hundred miles."

"Then there are diminutive reefs and coral atolls hereabouts. They are down in the very latest charts of the Government surveys. I looked over one of them while at Newport, though there has been no official issue of copies as yet."

"That is certainly an island," said the mate, who was also looking through a telescope. "It is immovable, and I can distinguish it otherwise as land."

This proved to be the truth, and at about the time it turned out so, Tidewell announced that the other object was a craft, bottom up.

A little later on, when both objects were to be distinctly seen with the unassisted eye, the master of the Ganymede turned to Colonel Sherwood with a peculiar expression.

"It is the Fearnaught!" he said.

"What are you sure?"

"I'd swear to those hull-lines and the spring of that centerboard, sticking up in the air like the fin on a blue shark's back. Bulwarks stove, too. See?"

This also proved a fact, on closer investigation, and Captain Tidewell prepared to visit the island, in order to discover if there were any signs there of the crew of the ill-fated yacht having effected a landing.

The three gentlemen, at their eager request, accompanied them.

The island was a coral atoll, about a mile long, and half as broad.

That is, it was an oval-shaped bowl, with a narrow green rim, sparsely grown with herbage and a few low-sized cocoa-nut trees, inclosing a central lagune of clear fresh water, the atoll itself being raggedly belted with jagged reefs a mile or more away, which protect it against the sea, which otherwise, so low-lying was its rim, the waves must have entirely swept over in times of storm.

Entrance through the reef was easily found, and a landing on the atoll effected.

On the sandy beach of the inner lagune, whose crystal waters were found to fairly teem with brilliantly hued fish of many descriptions, there were numerous footmarks, which seemed comparatively fresh-made, and as the storm had been unaccompanied by rain, while the sand was naturally rather damp and solid, they had remained.

"A boat-load of the poor devils doubtless succeeded in saving themselves," said Tidewell, after a brief examination of the indications, "and they probably landed here for a supply of fresh water. Ah, yes; see—there is where they pulled up their boat on the outer beach."

"If this wreck happened in our storm," cried Howland, eagerly, "we ought to be close upon the castaways' track."

Something seemed to whisper to him that it would be Burley's luck to be among the saved, if but a handful in all."

"Or in the squall that preceded it," replied the yacht-master, "which, however, ought to place us not more than fifty miles in their wake. But let us carry back to Mrs. Howland the news of our discovery; and here is a capital chance for filling our water-casks, as the water to be obtained at Bermuda is not always of the best."

CHAPTER XXXII.

"SCOUNDREL'S LUCK."

ELEANOR shared her husband's impression that it would be just Burley's good fortune to be among the survivors from the Fearnaught's wreck.

"I am not sorry to feel it, either," she said.

"If it should turn out that the sea has robbed us of our chance to land him in the State Prison at Sing Sing (and at the hardest of labor, too, Charley," in a lower voice, "which you were enabled to forego,) I frankly confess that I would be correspondingly depressed."

Howland's eyes gloomily blazed, but he only pressed her hand, without answering.

"For my part," cried Colonel Sherwood, "I bear the loss of the Fearnaught herself most to heart, notwithstanding that some of her crew were my old bands—God rest or keep them, as the case may be! She was a noble sloop, and when first launched she was without a rival."

After water had been taken on board, an attempt was made to right the Fearnaught, but it was found to be impracticable, save as involving a longer delay than could be ventured.

So the unfortunate yacht was left upside down, while the Ganymede once more headed away, with a fair hope, on the part of those chiefly interested, of overhauling the wrecked yacht's boat before she could make port.

But light head winds, in which the sloop's sailing qualities were at the worst advantage, now prevailed.

There was no sign of any boat, and the headlands of St. George's Harbor were in full view soon after sunrise of the following day.

After the yacht had come to anchor, Eleanor anxiously awaited such news as should be brought her by Charles, who had already put off for the town, accompanied by Sherwood and Spender, in the all but certain anticipation of finding the castaways there, or word of them, as having arrived at Hamilton, the chief town of the adjoining island of Great Bermuda.

But when she at last perceived the boat returning there was a generally discouraging air about it, and a few minutes later both Howland and Spender dejectedly shook their heads at her.

"Scoundrel's luck!" exclaimed Charles, as he came up over the side.

"What?" cried Nelly; "was not Burley among the saved?"

"Yes, with but two others. He has been on the island, and he is off again."

He pointed far away to the eastward, where a dim trail of gray smoke against the soft blue of the horizon line indicated the passage of an outgoing ocean steamer.

"It is the French steam freighter La Touraine, from Martinique for Havre," he said, bitterly. "She quitted St. George's last night at ten o'clock, and John Burley is her passenger."

In brief: Burley and two others, Gando and Bertazzo, had alone survived the wreck of the Farnsworth, escaping in her only boat. One of the trio, Gando, had died on the passage from the nameless atoll to the Bermudas. The others had reached St. George's at noon of the day preceding the Ganymede's arrival. Bertazzo was in a dying condition, and was taken to the marine hospital, where he now was, delirious, and with no hope of recovery. Burley, however, had succeeded in bearing up wonderfully, and, as he was said to have been well provided with money, the probability was that he had brought away with him all his ill-gotten gains, though this seemed scarcely credible by reason of the nature of the shipwreck. But there was no doubt whatever that he had taken passage for France on the Touraine.

Such was the information that had been gathered from the authorities of the port.

As the Touraine was a notoriously sluggish craft, however, there was still a chance that, with favoring winds, the Ganymede could outstrip her steam-power with her immense spread of sail. But, unfortunately, she had suffered no little strain in the storm, which would render a full twenty-four hours' detention for repairs absolutely indispensable.

Nothing could be done against the unavoidable, and while the repairs were in progress the ladies improved the opportunity to make some explorations on shore, where Miss Bigbee, who had never been in the tropics before was especially exercised over many of the strange sights revealed.

"Goodness gracious!" she at one time exclaimed, as the party came to a pause at the head of an unsavory lane, lined with negro hovels in the suburbs of St. George's; "look at that, Eleanor. Negro boys and gals, half-grown, and as naked as when they were born, to say nothing of the urchins and babies splashing in the gutter yonder!"

"Oh, that is nothing," abstractedly replied Eleanor, chiefly occupied with the surrounding scenery, which was very fine. "I suppose they are used to it, and the weather is uncomfortably hot, one must admit."

"Ciel! Je le trouve très comique," (Heavens! I find it very comical), laughed Florine. "A nigger baby especially is just too cunning for anything."

"Comeek, eh?" snorted Aunt Jerusha. "Rather say *trageek* and *terrieeek*, you heartless girl. Oh!" shaking her inseparable parasol aloft with both hands; "why is it permitted? Why don't heaven rain down scorpions and brimstone on the head of tyrant man, rather than permit him to wreak this outrage upon what he vainly terms—ha! ha!—the weaker sex?"

"Nonsense, aunt!" said Eleanor, a little fretfully; "I remark that tyrant woman is quite as promiscuous hereabouts as tyrant man, and surely the one sex is quite as black and dirty and primitive as the other. Let us go over among those rocks. They say there is a famous grotto with a legended spring in it somewhere around here."

But Miss Bigbee even found fault with the grotto and its legended spring when they were discovered, and both Eleanor and her maid secretly indulged the regret, as they had frequently done before, that the spinster had ever been made one of the voyagers.

By inducing the shipyard hands, through liberal pay, to work day and night, the Ganymede was ready for sea soon after sunrise of the following day.

No time was lost in getting under way, and the skimmer of the seas once more sheeted seawards upon a long stern chase, which was destined to be no more successful than its predecessor.

To abbreviate our story, it is enough to say that, after a long and tedious voyage, the Ganymede reached the port of Havre just twelve hours after the Touraine had come to anchor, and to learn that Burley had instantly quitted her with the avowed intention of starting for Paris.

The Ganymede's passengers lost no time in making for the same destination.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

IN PARIS.

UPON reaching Paris, in pursuance with a pre-arranged plan of Eleanor's, with her husband's approval, Colonel Sherwood took Miss Bigbee and Florine with him to the Grande Hotel, while the young couple, accompanied by Hugh Spender, secured unobtrusive apartments in the Rue de Bandeur, a little by-street of the Montmartre.

Eleanor, who had been to Paris several times before, while neither Howland nor Spender had, though both were fairly conversant with the language, had formed this arrangement for a number of reasons.

In the first place, she wished to rid herself of Miss Bigbee on general principles, while Florine could also be dispensed with, no less than the colonel.

Then it was her intention to make use of her detective's disguise almost exclusively in the prosecution of her quest, and she was more than willing to spare herself her father's comments upon the same, which would scarcely have been of a complimentary nature.

Therefore, almost directly upon the trio taking possession of their new quarters, she made her appearance as the detective's Double, which she retained, with but few interruptions, to the end.

Howland didn't like it at first, but quickly became used to the transformation, and after that found no cause to object to it.

Before quitting Havre, they had assured themselves of Burley's having really taken a train for Paris; and not long after their installment in the capital they had made themselves no less certain of his having arrived there, by applying at the Prefecture of Police, whose detectives, it seemed, had by a fortunate coincidence been on the lookout for an expected criminal from Barcelona who bore a striking resemblance to Burley, whom they had therefore briefly had under examination.

With this as their first clew, Burley at the end of the second day had been traced to an obscure hotel at Chantilly, where, however, all further signs of him had been abruptly lost.

"Look here!" said Eleanor, when two or three more days had been wasted in fruitless trips and inquiries in various directions; "this will never do. We must change our mode of procedure."

"What do you propose, then, my major?" her husband asked, with twinkling eyes, for she was carrying her fictitious character more bravely than ever before, though still comparatively new to him. "You are the boss in the undertaking, as a matter of course."

"Certainly," seconded Cousin Hugh. "We are but subordinate tail-tags to the detective kite of which our friend Falconbridge here controls the string—is, in other words, the guiding spirit."

"Thanks, messieurs," nonchalantly, "but there is little need of telling me what I am so well aware of already."

"But what do you propose, my dear?" Howland asked, more seriously.

"This, for one thing: We must no longer hunt together, or even in couples; but singly and individually—each on his own hook, as they say."

"Good idea! if I don't lose myself or get into trouble when left to my own devices."

"That is just as I feel," observed Spender. "Paris is so big and intricate and universal, that this search of a single man among its motley crowds is looking for a needle in a haystack, and a mighty big stack at that. And then Nelly is persistent in refusing to employ the municipal detectives."

"Yes—for the present, at least," she replied. "I do want to carry this thing through, without that sort of assistance. Perhaps it is a matter of pride; but I don't care."

"A very good sort of pride, anyway," observed her husband, with one of his tender looks, which more than recalled all she had done for him. "But what is your particular plan now?"

"Let us survey the situation first. Unless Burley should have, unperceived, recognized us during the few days we have been in Paris, he can scarcely have any further apprehensions, I think, that we are on his track."

"No; the fact of his coming here direct from Havre, without much of any concealment, would seem to prove that."

"But don't let us take anything for granted, my friends," advised Cousin Hugh. "Besides, he will be on the alert for some sort of pursuit. He wouldn't be such a fool as to suppose Colonel Sherwood would make no effort to recover the stolen money."

"Still, the interposition of the loss of the Farnsworth would naturally make him feel

tolerably secure here in Paris," Eleanor resumed. "But I believe with you that it will be well to take nothing absolutely as granted, either with regard to his state of mind or his movements."

"What is your plan?"

"This, for the present. There are still three slight clews to be investigated. One answering the description of our man, as you know, was seen recently in the vicinity of the Cemetery of Pere la Chaise. We have again heard of a suspicious character who might possibly be among that nest of little streets near the northeastern corner of the Bois de Boulogne. And then the one clew that seemed to promise us the most certainty (barring the Chantilly trail, where we were all but upon him) was at that pretty little wine-shop in the neighborhood of the Tuilleries."

"Well."

"I shall set each of you his especial scout," with a smile, "reserving for myself the one that remains."

"That is fair," said Spender.

"You, Charles," continued the detective's Double, "shall take up the quarter of the Tuilleries till further orders. Cousin Hugh, I shall intrust you with the vicinity of Pere la Chaise. And I shall pay exclusive attention to the Bois de Boulogne."

This was agreeable all around, and it was forthwith acted on.

The first day of the new, or triple, order of investigation, ended discouragingly enough.

On meeting in the evening for consultation and a comparison of notes, at their apartments in the Rue de Bandeur, it was found that literally nothing had been effected.

"Never mind," said Eleanor, cheerfully. "There will not always be this monotony of non-success. We must try again."

On betaking themselves off for the following day, Eleanor betook herself of an insignificant little wine-room in the vicinity of the Bois, which had attracted her attention from the first, yet which she had thus far neglected.

She at once sought it out, took a seat, and, picking up *Le Petit Journal*, ordered some wine.

The proprietress was a good-looking woman of middle age, and at the tables were two or three men in blouses, who looked like workmen on a holiday, or out of employment.

While she was observantly sipping her wine, a man, very swarthy, very heavily bearded, and attired something like a sailor, entered the place, took a table without seeing her, and ordered some wine, with bread and cheese, with a slightly foreign accent.

Eleanor was instantly impressed with the notion that this man was in disguise, or decidedly anxious to appear other than his real self.

He was about Burley's height, but, as it seemed to her, thicker set and more muscular.

She kept very quiet, and fell to secretly watching him narrowly.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AN UNLOOKED-FOR ADVENTURE.

PRESENTLY when the man had finished eating, and was almost at the bottom of his bottle, he chanced to turn his face and eyes full toward her.

He started, quickly rose, and having already paid for his refreshment, lounged out of the shop with a suspicious uneasiness in his pretended leisureliness.

Eleanor had thought she recognized a never-to-be-forgotten expression in the black, piercing eyes that had momentarily encountered her own.

Instantly she was in pursuit.

Perceiving this, the man quickened his pace, crossing the boulevard, and entering the Bois.

Then, inasmuch as she was still at his heels, he darted into the woods and broke into a run.

She was after him, without an instant's hesitation.

Trained in all athletic sports to an extent that was most unusual in an American young woman, even at the present day when so much more attention is being paid to her physical culture than formerly, Eleanor was an especially good runner, and ever since she had taken to wearing her detective's habit, she had gloried greatly in the freedom of movement that it afforded her.

She now put her best foot foremost, and soon had the satisfaction of perceiving her fugitive, fleet enough at the outset, show signs of distress, chiefly it would seem by reason of his superfluity of flesh and consequent shortness of wind.

Presently, when a lonely glade of the Park had been reached, he suddenly came to a pause. Then, confronting his pursuer, he placed his hand warningly in the bosom of his blouse, and calmly waited.

Eleanor had also placed her hand upon her pistol, but, on coming up, a single searching glance was sufficient to convince her that the man was not Burley.

"My friend," the detective's Double hastened to say, "I owe you an apology. You are not the man I took you for, though the resemblance is somewhat striking."

The man, who had something not altogether unattractive in his dark face, seemed suddenly

relieved, though he continued to regard her with a lingering suspicion.

"I am glad of that—if it is true," he replied, in such poor French as a Spaniard or Italian new to the language might use.

"It is true," exclaimed the pretended Falconbridge, earnestly. "I assure you of it."

"Still, you are a detective?"

"Yes—but an American detective."

"Oh, that is a different matter!" in much better English than his French, though still with a foreign tinge.

A sudden thought came to Eleanor like a revelation—as, indeed, it was.

"Look here, my friend," she said, also in English, "I have an idea. Tell me first—I swear that you can safely trust me!—if you have reason to shun the Parisian detectives."

"I should say I had," with a peculiar smile.

"Well, you must be the fugitive they were after when, mistaking him for you, they took the man I am after into custody at the Havre Railway Station a few days ago, though they discovered their mistake and let him off after a brief examination—unluckily for me."

"It is true; I got wind of that little incident later on."

And now, apparently altogether reassured, the man nonchalantly seated himself at the turf foot of a gnarled old tree.

Not to be outdone, Eleanor carelessly seated herself at his side, though with her brain already busy with a project for utilizing this chance acquaintance so oddly brought about.

"If you will help me," she observed, "I will help you. What do you say?"

"I am afraid you couldn't help me much," the man slowly answered.

"Don't be too sure of that. I am not wholly what I seem, or what I declared myself to be. I am rich and can have large influence at my command. But, as a preliminary, it will be necessary that you should repose the fullest confidence in me."

The man eyed his companion steadily, and seemed to deliberate.

"So be it," said he at last. "You inspire me with confidence. I shall trust in you."

"Come; this is a brave beginning."

"Ask me what you please; I shall be frank and veracious."

"I'll take you at your word. What is your name?"

"Joseph Razzio."

"An Italian?"

"A Corsican."

"But you are last from Barcelona?"

"True; where that for which they would arrest me—on extradition, you understand—was committed."

Eleanor hesitated with the next question on the tip of her tongue.

"I shall not spare you."

"Go ahead!"

"Are you wanted for a robbery or assault?"

"For neither," indifferently. "I am a murderer."

It was said as unconcernedly as if he had announced himself a chicken-thief.

Eleanor experienced a violent, almost a shuddering shock; but something in the man had won upon her, and by a great effort of will she maintained her seat at Joseph Razzio's side, without even a shrinking manifestation.

"A grave self charge, sir!" was all she said.

"It is a short story," continued the other, thoughtfully. "Look you! By vocation, I am a sailor, with all the recklessness engendered by an adventurous and roving life. By nationality, I am a Corsican, with the revengeful instincts of my race, and, as a matter of course, with my vendetta. What true Corsican is without that? As well imagine a horse without hoofs, a fish devoid of fins, an eagle forgetful of her eyrie and her famishing brood!"

"Seeing the shore sights at Barcelona, I saw a gallant officer of the Royal Guards passing the wine-shop in which I was sitting alone, and my heart, after first standing still, gave a great joyous bound. Comrade, I recognized that man. He was a Valletto!"

"Of a family so named?"

Razzio nodded.

"Of course; the one with which the Razzios have had their vendetta for nine hundred years."

"Time enough to forget all about the original quarrel, one would think."

"Friend, in the vendetta a true Corsican never forgets!"

"Nor forgives, either, I suppose?"

"Forgive—an hereditary enemy?" in blank amazement. "What for?"

"Oh, well; proceed, Joseph."

"Now I might give you a history of the quarrel from the beginning. It is a rare tale; and what with the hundreds of retaliatory assassinations on either side—"

"There won't be time, Mr. Razzio; and I really think I can forego the promised horrors, however pleasing. Let us get back to Barcelona."

"Ah, then! Well, no sooner did I recognize my Spanish lieutenant of the Royal Guard as Lucien Valletto, formerly of Ajaccio, than I says to myself: 'Here's angel's own luck for

me! He is the last of the Vallettos; I am the last of the Razzios. And by the count, the Vallettos are just one life ahead of the Razzios in the vendetta.' Understand?"

"I think so."

"Ah; it was a godsend! You see, the thing was perfectly square when Lucien's older brother ambushed and slew my only brother; I being a mere boy at the time, and Lucien little more than a child. That left the Vallettos one ahead on the score, you see."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE CORSICAN.

ELEANOR nodded, her curiosity in her strange companion having deepened as her sense of repugnance had increased.

"But that wasn't the worst of it," the Corsican resumed. "Boy as I was, I might soon have evened up the score most conscientiously, for there would have been numerous chances of shooting the elder Valletto down from behind a bush or ledge, while he should be on his way to confession, or to visit his girl. But, *Corpo di Bacchio!* think of my adversity, comrade. Before I could get at him, he fell over a precipice and broke his neck!"

"Is it possible?"

In spite of her horror, Eleanor could not abstain from the irony, there was such a ghastly ludicrousness in the man's earnestness.

"God's truth! I could have dashed my own brains out, over my unmerited misfortune, but for one thing—the lusty babe, the little Lucien, crowing and kicking up his fat legs in the Signorina Valletto's arms—now the last of his race, as I had become the last of mine. 'Courage, sad heart!' I said to myself; 'he will grow, the little Lucien, he will become a man. And, after I shall have killed him, the score of the vendetta will not only be squared, but the Razzios will be irrevocably triumphant, for the first time in nine hundred years, for I shall still be left to represent my ancient race, while the Vallettos will be extinct, annihilated, wiped out, abolished!' Ha, ha, ha! Think of it!"

"I am thinking of it." And Eleanor looked at the speaker yet more curiously.

"My sole consolation, you understand. God's love if anything serious chanced to the infant, I was beside myself with apprehension, lest Providence should cheat me out of my revenge. When the brat had the measles, I passed hours in daily prayer that he might be spared. Even his little whooping-cough filled me with apprehensions. And when he had the scarlet fever, I was that worried and anxious that I lost flesh, until little more than a skeleton.

"However, the Saints be praised! he lived! Then I went to sea, thinking fondly of how much grown I should find the darling enemy on my return.

"But who can foretell the caprices of the fell jade, Fate? I went with the intention of being away twenty months; I was gone twenty years!—Too long a story, that—shipwreck, years on a desert island of the South Pacific, a captive of Malay pirates, a soldier in Persia, a hunter in the Brazils, a beachcomber on the Coromandel Coast—all were in my experience! I was the football of Fate, never knowing when she would be wearied of sporting with me, if ever at all.

"Home in old Corsica at last, though! And what to find! Misery and despair—my brightest hopes, my holiest aspirations, blighted, apparently forever! Lucien Valletto had attained to manhood and disappeared, none knew whither. The widow, his mother, was dead, but it had been in response to her dying prayers that he had taken himself off unto the unknown—to elude my just vengeance, mind you!"

"God of Justice! I was in despair—it was simply terrible. Now think, comrade, I went to sea again, and carried about with me that load at my heart for five years longer—and for what? To find my man in Barcelona a month ago, as I have said. God was good to me at last, though pretty long about it, you might say."

"How I hurried after my lieutenant, tapped him on the shoulder, and made myself known. 'It shall be face to face!' I cried, embracing him. 'Where shall it be?'

"Now, Lucien acted very creditably—for a Valletto; or I thought so at the time. He chided himself for my long sufferings, and cursed the hour when he had listened to his mother's insistence upon his taking to flight. He took me out in the middle of the Plaza, and pointed to an open glade on the distant mountain-side. 'Let it be there at sunset, and with pistols, my dear Joseph,' he said, returning my caress. 'It is there that I shall have the joy of killing you.' I smiled, and we parted.

"At sunset I was entering the glade, when a shot pierced my tarpaulin. I turned in a flash. The coward was there, with two of his fellow-officers. He had shot at me from behind, and was leveling his revolver for a better aim. As if Heaven would permit a last Valletto to elude a last Razzio's vengeance by such treachery!"

"My first bullet staggered him before he could fire again, and then, emptying my revolver into his prone body, I fell upon him with my knife and cut him to pieces."

"The vendetta was ended, the centuries were

appeased; a Razzio still lived, the Vallettos were no more.

"But the officers, who had comraded the coward, had fled from me as from a wild beast. The alarm had been given, and I approached the city to find myself everywhere in quest as an assassin. I fled deeper into the mountains. Well, that is all, comrade. I was there, and I am here, still uncaptured. Now you have the situation."

The duel episode, or rather *denouement*, had put a somewhat different face upon the man's crime in the mind of his listener.

"Hark you, Razzio," said Eleanor, after a long pause. "There were two witnesses to Valletto's treacherous first attack upon you?"

"Exactly as I have said."

"Would they testify impartially?"

"Probably; they are Spanish gentlemen of education."

"Be easy then; I shall get you off eventually."

"What! you will do that?"

"I am sure of it. But in the mean time, you must avoid arrest, if possible."

"Trust me for that. And what shall I do for you in return?"

"Help me to catch my man, who resembles you so greatly. His name is John Burley, otherwise Juan Borleo—a West Indian."

"Is it for murder?" hesitatingly.

"No; he is a dastardly robber and perjurer."

"Say no more; I shall help you."

"That is well."

"What is your name?"

"Falconbridge," reluctantly.

"And your address?"

She gave it to him.

"Good! Since you trust me, I trust you. Adios, comrade. We shall meet again before long."

The Corsican then abruptly walked on into the wood and disappeared.

Eleanor remained staring after him for some moments, as if realizing only with some difficulty that the entire adventure was not a dream.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A SIDE ISSUE.

As it was still early in the morning, it suddenly occurred to Eleanor that she ought to visit the Grande Hotel to see how her aunt and Florine were enjoying themselves.

She had not seen them since the separation upon their first arrival in Paris.

Colonel Sherwood was not to be found, being off for the races, but both the women were at home.

To Eleanor's surprise and amusement, they did not speak as they passed by, and she was not long in discovering the cause to be of an affair of the heart.

Florine wore a magnificent Jacqueminot rose in her sunny hair and a yellow Marsala Neil one at her breast, both of which she unblushingly declared to have been given her by Captain Tidewell on the preceding evening; while Miss Jerusha had in some way got hold of a *carte de visite* photograph of the same gallant mariner, which she had no hesitation in exhibiting to the pseudo-detective as a convincing proof of the yacht-master's unqualified devotion to her maturer charms.

"Ha!" she exclaimed, with an effort at commiserating amusement, to Eleanor, apart; "the gentleman gave her an entire bouquet, as a matter of unmeaning courtesy, when fairly bullied into taking her to the opera (for the brazen hussy does nothing but throw herself at the poor man's head,) and she has merely selected those two specimens from the bunch. While, as for myself, my dear Eleanor, I am sure that Conrad has altogether too profound a devotion, too lofty a regard, to think of expressing himself in such an inane and commonplace manner. Examine his photo more critically, my dear girl. The expression is a trifle stern, perhaps, but"—and so on.

"Dear ma'm'selle," Florine rattled away when obtaining her opportunity, "if you could see how the poor old petrification acts in monsieur's presence, you would crack your corset-bones with laughter. He showed us both the photograph one evening, having brought it at my request, and then it was mysteriously missing—not to be found anywhere. Ha, ha, ha! you can guess the rest. Do you remark my pretty flowers? Yonder in the little vase (monsieur's gift to me also) is the entire bouquet. And you should have seen the look in his divine dark eyes when he selected these two roses from their midst for me to wear."

Not wishing to risk meeting the gallant captain in her detective aspect, Eleanor speedily brought her visit to a close, after leaving her love for her father.

On meeting with her husband and Hugh Spender in the Rue de Bandeau that evening, their interchange of experiences for the day developed a strange complication.

In the morning, at about the same time that Eleanor was having her interview with the Corsican, Howland had caught sight of Burley (he was positive there could be no mistake) in the Champs d'Elysée. He had let his beard grow entirely over his face in a way that alter-

ed his appearance greatly, and had seemed to be in high feather. He was in a cabriolet, together with a distinguished looking woman, but after an unsuccessful chase, Howland had finally lost sight of his fugitive amid the thronging vehicles of the Rue de Helder.

As for Spender, he was no less certain that he had also got a transient view of the hide-and-seek fugitive.

It was early in the afternoon, and among the multitudinous tombs of Pere la Chaise itself, that he had seen him in a workingman's blouse. It was but for an instant, however, the man vanishing no less mysteriously than he had appeared.

"Look you, my friends," said the detective's Double, when the trio of experiences had been duly compared, "all this is very extraordinary, but it can be explained. You are no less sure than Charles is, Cousin Hugh?"

"I think so," replied Spender, with a slight hesitation. "The man's beard was likewise grown in full, but I felt quite certain he could be none other than Burley."

"But wasn't he somewhat more robust of person than you would look for in Burley?"

"Decidedly so; but the latter may have grown stouter, you know."

"Possibly. But wasn't there the suggestion of the sailor in this man's workingman's dress?"

"Yes. Now I come to think of it, there was."

"Everything is clear. Charles must have glimpsed at the real John Burley, while your man, Cousin Hugh, was no doubt one with my Corsican, who must have drifted over in your quarter of the city in the afternoon, and whose shyness would have prevented your obtaining more than that passing glimpse."

They were all agreed that this was the explanation of the enigma, or what had at first seemed such.

"For the first day of our new order of search, we are getting along amazingly," cried Eleanor. "Let us but keep it up persistently, and we can scarcely fail of success. But, if the truth must be told, I have more faith in the promised co-operation of my extraordinary Corsican than in aught else to that end."

But much disappointment was destined to intervene.

The three days following were mere blanks, not a sign or suggestion of the quarry being obtained by either of the searchers.

"Courage!" exclaimed Eleanor, who alone of the trio, never seemed to lose heart in the least. "Paris is a vast place, and Burley has surely not quitted its precincts as yet, or I should have received an intimation."

The next day was a Sunday, the great pleasure-seeking day of the Parisians, and, on Eleanor's part at least, there was a better success.

She was strolling on the western and less frequented side of the Bois, when a man approached whom she instantly recognized as Joseph Bazzio.

The seafaring suggestion had disappeared from his aspect, and he was now rather smartly attired, after the manner of a prosperous artisan on his holiday.

"You have not been to see me, as I expected," said Eleanor.

"It would not have been safe as yet, friend," was the reply. "Juan Borleo is still suspicious of my disinterestedness, I am sure."

"What! you have made the man's acquaintance?"

"We enjoyed the theater together night before last, and I dined with him at the Cafe de Brazil yesterday."

"Why, this is no less gratifying than surprising!"

"I rather thought it would please you, Signor Falconbridge."

"How did you make his acquaintance?"

"By the rarest luck. Late in the afternoon of that first day of my making your acquaintance so oddly, comrade, a horse attached to a cabriolet ran away near the Arc de Triomphe. I stopped him at some risk to myself. A gentleman and a fine lady were its inmates, and, as there was a smashed wheel, they were compelled to descend. The gentleman's facial likeness to myself was marked. I knew that Juan Borleo was before me. He was grateful, and offered me money, which I declined notwithstanding I was in sore need. He then gave me the address of an obscure cafe, saying that he would thank me at his leisure in the evening, naming the hour.

Hero Razzio came to a pause, his bearded lips wearing their peculiar smile.

"Well, you went, I suppose?"

"Of course."

"But why did you not notify me of the appointment without delay?"

"I do nothing unreflectingly, comrade. I make sure. True, I went to the cafe, but Juan Borleo did not. He broke the appointment."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

JOSEPH RAZZIO'S PROGRESS.

ELEANOR gazed at the Corsican inquiringly.

"I see," she said. "He had deceived you, and you had suspected that he would?"

"Exactly," replied Joseph Razzio. "Juan

Borleo has reason to be as suspicious of untried men as I am. He had doubtless said to himself: 'How do I know that this fellow of the sailor's blouse is not a spy of the police? Let me not display my gratitude over-hastily.' Juan Borleo was consequently not on hand at the place of appointment; there was another in his stead."

"Another?"

"Yes; madame's confidential servant."

"Who is 'madame'?"

"Madame la Comtesse d'Espigneau."

"And pray who is she?"

"The fine lady who was with Juan Borleo in the cabriolet."

"Ah! he has then made an opportune conquest, and in high life?"

"Yes."

"But countesses do not ride in cabriolets."

"Not often, most likely, or save as a sensation."

"Well, this is decidedly interesting at all events. Proceed, Joseph."

"The substitute made the first advances, not I. He made himself known, said there were imperative reasons for monsieur's extreme caution, and asked me for my history."

"Well."

"I first satisfied myself that the little secretary was safe, and then complied with his request. You see, comrade, I did not forget you; I was bound to become thick with this Juan Borleo."

"Yes."

"Well, it was a go. Another appointment was made, and next day I met my man. He was not only grateful, but insisted on my accepting some money. I did so to the extent of improving my wardrobe, but no more. Then followed the theater in his company, and after that the dinner at the Cafe de Brazil. That is all; but perhaps it is not so bad for a beginning, eh?"

"By no means. You have done splendidly, Joseph. But still—"

"Speak out, comrade."

"I don't see why you have delayed so about notifying me of your progress at the address I gave you."

"Softly, comrade. All in good time. I no longer belong to myself, since making the acquaintance, but to Juan Borleo."

"Please explain."

"I can go nowhere without having a spy at my heels—either the little secretary, or some other of madame's retinues. I have only escaped them now by good luck, and it cannot be for long. A spy may appear hereabouts at any moment. In that case be careful to keep out of sight, comrade, or it may ruin all. Monsieur Juan is still by no means certain of me, as I said."

"The countess must think a good deal of the man."

"She is distractedly in love with him. Should all go well—his safety from prosecution be assured, for instance—there will doubtless be a marriage."

"Is the woman really a countess?"

"Undoubtedly, but—" Razzio made a slight grimace, as to imply that the noble lady's reputation was not of the best.

"What is she like?" asked Eleanor, curiously.

"Pronouncedly *passée*—forty-five, if a day; large, and a blonde, perhaps of some beauty in the dim past; rich, an inveterate gambler; and I would not care to test her temper."

"Where is her hotel?"

"Rue de Helder, No. 423."

"How could Borleo have fallen into such luck?"

"Comrade, the mysteries of providence and love are alike inscrutable."

"But Burley cannot venture to live at her hotel?"

"He does not so venture."

"What can be his life in Paris, then?"

"It is a mystery. I doubt if he lodges a week at a time in one place; he chooses obscure cafes, and probably never patronizes the same one twice successively."

"And yet he can venture to appear in public with Madame la Comtesse; and he hesitated not to show himself at the theater with you."

"True; but such instances are rare, I think."

"Constantly on the alert?"

"Like a lynx."

"Ahl let me not forget: Can he, think you, surmise of my being here in Paris as yet?"

"I think not."

"Then why should he be so painfully on the alert?"

"Robbers always are. They don't know when their turn may come, you know."

"Then you can't promise when or where I can lay hold of him?"

"Yes, I am here for that purpose; it is, therefore, fortunate that I have chanced to meet you in this lonely quarter of the Bois, as I had hoped."

Eleanor's heart gave a great exultant bound. Was it possible that she was then near the end of this detective masquerading, of which, in her secret sense of modesty, she was daily growing more wearied and impatient?

"Why?" she asked.

"You observe," pointing, "yonder secluded little rustic bench among the trees?"

"Yes."

"It is the rendezvous. He will confer with me there this evening."

She looked at him searchingly, and with perhaps a lingering suspicion, which the other was quick to apprehend.

The Corsican shrugged his shoulders.

"Isn't it rather late in the day to mistrust me now, comrade?" he gravely inquired.

"I do not really mistrust you, Razzio," earnestly. "Only this easy and convenient doves-tailing of coincidences and the like, cannot but excite my—wonder."

"I shall cheerfully make clear whatever may be not so as yet."

"Why should you have a rendezvous with my man here in the Bois, instead of at one of his *petit cafés*, as heretofore?"

"He is daily growing more wary. Besides, I fixed the rendezvous at his request, and we are to confer upon a ticklish subject."

"What is that?"

"Upon a scheme for breaking the *rouge et noir* bank at Monte Carlo. We are both gamblers, he and I, and Borleo is certain he has hit upon a sure system, or martingale. I am to give him my opinion of it here at dusk this evening."

"Good! But then Burley was not a gamester when in New York."

"Always, though in secret. He has avowed it to me. Besides, a West Indian Creole, and not a gambler? What an anomaly!"

"Excellent, then! I shall be here with friends to pounce upon him at the appointed time."

"You have the necessary prefecture papers in readiness?"

"Yes."

"Good! and you won't forget my case?"

"By no means. It will be necessary for you to submit to the extradition, of course; but I will stand by you, even to the extent of accompanying you back to Barcelona, if indispensable; where, if your story can be corroborated, I guarantee to see you escape punishment."

"Oh, the story is all right. Corpo di Bacchiali!" with a chuckle of intense enjoyment; "not a male Valletto left in the world, while the male Razzios are still represented above ground. A brave vendetta, comrade—Hist! slip behind and out of sight."

"What is the matter?"

"The little secretary of Madame la Comtesse! Don't you see him at the end of the walk yonder, and strolling this way? Quick!"

Eleanor caught a glimpse of the spy, and then slipped away.

She had half a notion to watch the pair from some lurking place in the wood, but thought better of it.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE LAST OF THE RAZZIOS.

NATURALLY enough, there was much jubilation on the part of Charles Howland and Hugh Spender over the news that was brought home to them by the detective's Double when they all met in the Rue de Bandeir late in the afternoon of that day, for there had been no change in the monotony of bad luck for either of the pair.

"Rough customer as he is," exclaimed Cousin Hugh, "we'll have to stand by this Corsican, if he shall only make good his promise."

"That is true," observed Howland. "Still, in spite of my hopefulness, I can't get rid of a certain dubiousness."

"But Razzio is to be trusted," said Eleanor. "I feel certain of that."

"Apart from this, I know Burley of old. His penetration is extraordinary, while his cunning, on occasion, can approximate to genius."

"You haven't talked with my Corsican, or you would scarcely fear for him. However, what can either of you know of this Countess d' Espigneau?"

"I have heard of her, and that is all," replied Howland.

"Why, the woman is notorious!" cried Spender.

"In what way?"

"Every way that's bad. Rich, an inveterate and singularly fortunate gamester, ostracized by her aristocratic circle—who are perhaps only more secret in their corruption—unscrupulous, and strongly suspected of poisoning her husband, ten years ago, whose vast wealth she inherited, and, strangely enough, has managed to keep."

"A remarkable character, truly, and doubtless one to ably defend her fiance, if the Corsican is right in deeming Burley to be such."

"I don't doubt it," observed Howland, a little gloomily. "The scoundrel would be just the man to fascinate the *passe* imagination of such a creature."

"Like enough," interposed Cousin Hugh. "And should we fail to nab our man this evening, the interior of her hotel in the Rue de Helder would be a dangerous place to look for him, without an extra amount of finesse."

"That is doubtless true, but we must not even

suppose a failure," cried Eleanor. "I trust in my Corsican. But come, messieurs. It is no trifling distance from the Montmartre to the Bois de Boulogne, and twilight is not far away."

On reaching the further side of the Bois, the first dusk of evening was just beginning to thicken among the trees.

They waited until the lingering light became a little more uncertain, and then cautiously approached the spot where Eleanor and Razzio had last conversed, on the constant lookout for spies, but the wood and adjoining boulevard seemed alike solitary and deserted.

At last they came in sight of the rustic bench which was seen to be occupied by a single figure.

"It is Razzio," said Eleanor, in a low voice. "We must be patient. Burley has evidently not joined him yet, and he is waiting."

They continued to keep close and wait, though the figure on the bench, which was perfectly motionless, made not the slightest change in its expectant attitude.

In the mean time, the dusk had deepened considerably.

"Maybe the scoundrel has decided not to keep his appointment," murmured, Eleanor. "Come; I will lead the way, and have word with the Corsican, as to what he may think of the delay."

They noiselessly approached the rustic seat, Eleanor slightly in the advance.

Razzio half-reclined in one corner of the bench, his head thrown back, as if he might be a sleep.

But something in the man's attitude struck Eleanor as not natural.

She sprung forward, gave one look, and then shrank back with a low, horrified cry that brought her companions on the spot with a rush.

The "little secretary" had doubtless spied to better advantage than had been thought.

At all events the Corsican was neither waiting nor sleeping, and the fierce race of the Razzios, no less than that of the Valetto, was forevermore extinct.

He was stone-dead, with a huge stiletto—probably John Burley's—buried to the hilt in his heart.

As this tragic discovery was made, a low, diabolical laugh came from somewhere in the darkening wood.

They started and laid their hands on their revolvers, for the utterance was manifestly familiar to them all.

But nothing was to be seen, and the laugh was not repeated.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

AN UNEXPECTED APPARITION.

A WEEK had passed, the murdered Corsican was in his grave (whether he had been decently but unobtrusively laid at Eleanor's instance and expense), the police had about given up the hope of discovering his assassin, and further signs of the cunning fugitive, John Burley, otherwise Juan Borleo, were as absent as though he had ceased to exist.

The trio of searchers, while keeping their secret of the dead, had persistently, but unsuccessfully, continued their divided quest, until there were few corners of Paris that had escaped, and even Eleanor began to despair.

"We must find some means of obtaining an entrance to the hotel of the countess, if not into her confidence," she at last exclaimed, with something of her old energy, when the sixth day of uninterrupted non-success was gone. "There is no other way, and I simply will not give up. The question is, how can this best be attempted?"

"I am sure I can't make the ghost of a suggestion," Howland answered, on his part. "I am so wearied of the whole thing that I seem to have no fancy or suggestiveness left."

"I have never even had a good look at the woman yet," Eleanor continued, reflectively.

"But you can obtain that any day, Cousin Nell," said Hugh Spender.

"How?" eagerly.

"She seems to be taken with a fondness for art of late. I have twice seen her going into the Louvre since the new collection of paintings from the last *salon* has been on view there, and I have no doubt that she briefly visits the place every day."

"At what hour?"

"In the morning—at about eleven, I should say."

"A hint is as good as a word. *Messieurs mes collaborateurs*, there shall be a new departure.

Accordingly, on the following morning, Eleanor got herself up with extra care in the way of her make-up, for which a new and fashionable summer rig was forthcoming, and took herself to the Louvre.

Satisfied that by this time Burley, if still in Paris, must be perfectly aware of the quest for him that was on foot, with the dreaded "Falconbridge" at its head, she no longer exercised any caution in exploiting the character.

The vast *salons* of the Louvre, with their treas-

ures of art, are not ordinarily thronged with visitors before mid-day.

When Eleanor entered, there were few going in or coming out, and in several of the rooms she strolled through, there were scarcely any visitors on view, while others were empty.

At last, however, she saw the Countess d'Espagneau, whom she just knew by sight, ascending the main stair-case, and she from that moment kept her in view as closely as was possible without betraying her curiosity.

Madame d'Espagneau was a large stout woman, superbly dressed. Her florid face and large figure might have been attractive in her youth, but were no longer so in Eleanor's opinion (which, however, was one woman's of another, it must be remembered), while there was a sensual, half-cruel suggestion in her lips and her still fine eyes, which spoilt the effects of a face that might otherwise have been pleasing.

She led by a blue ribbon a fat little pug dog, whose collar was inlaid by gold, and was accompanied by two attendants. These were the "little secretary," whom the countess familiarly addressed as "Louis," and an elderly discreet-looking man who seemed a fine type of the true French valet, or serving man, of the old *regime*—attentive, obsequious, vigilant. This man she only occasionally spoke to, and then addressed him as Felix.

The countess seemed to be an indefatigable talker. She roamed from picture to picture, apparently examining each critically through the gold-rimmed *pince-nez* that was almost constantly in requisition in the dainty pinch of her plump, gloved hand, but not for a minute at a time did she neglect to pour forth her chatter to the devoted and perhaps to-be-comiserated Louis in a steady stream.

"All for effect!" was Eleanor's secret comment at last. "A little Catherine II. at heart, she is a little Machiavelli by nature—cold, cunning, reckless, unscrupulous!"

Then she instinctively fell to examining the attendants to the exclusion of the mistress.

She was at first struck by a look of vague unrest, almost of a haunting horror, underneath the external complacency of the smaller and younger man's demeanor. And it was not long before she was convinced that this singular under-look, or masked uneasiness, was reflected, though in a less marked degree, by the face of the valet, Felix.

It was as if they might be but recently from some tragic spectacle, which had photographed itself indelibly upon their consciousness.

Suddenly this thought flashed upon the detective's double:

"Those men were witnesses of the assassination of Joseph Razzio!"

At this juncture Madame la Comtesse took into her head that she must go, and Eleanor was left alone in the great *salon* at the upper end of the eastern suite.

She hesitated whether to stroll after her or not, though conscious that she must have taken note of her presence, though seeming to ignore it.

At last, however, she turned to quit the deserted *salon*.

As she did go, she thought for an instant that the door must be a mirror that was reflecting her disguised personality.

No!

She rubbed her eyes, and looked again. It was no reflection, but a reality.

There, confronting her in the doorway, his face no less puzzled than her own, was her exact image, saving only a few slight differences of dress.

Then the truth, long imagined, now for the first time realized, rushed upon her.

She was at last face to face with her prototype, with the man whom she had so long been counterfeiting—Falconbridge, the Falcon Detective, himself.

She had only half recovered her composure when the man, his face clearing off with a shrewd, half-stern expression, advanced to meet her.

"Who are you?" he quickly demanded.

"The—Falcon Detective's Double," was the stammered reply.

He burst into a short laugh, not altogether a displeased one.

"Well—I—should—say—so!" he slowly drawled out.

Then, after eying her attentively with his piercing eyes, during which she recovered the remainder of her self-possession, he asked, with his accustomed abruptness:

"Man or woman?"

"A woman."

Come with me, my—Double: you and I must have an explanation."

He led the way into a large, cool, deserted alcove, and signified a seat, while apportioning one for himself.

"You probably have an idea of a story," he said, curiously. "Let me have it."

Eleanor was very frightened, as being the only person from her recent culture with which she immediately recognized more profound.

In an hour's time he had given her the entire history of her assumption of his individuality, and everything connected with it.

His interest had deepened as she proceeded; at times it might be said to be not unmixed with approval, not to say admiration.

When she finished he burst into a low, rippling little laugh, such as self-contained, secretive men often have, and all the more musical for its presumptive rarity.

"Look you, Mrs. Howland," said he, "I am not so displeased, after all, at having been duplicated so admirably and by such a clever woman."

"Thank you, sir," and she slightly lowered her abashed eyes.

"I might help you out in this sleuth-chase, too, for that matter."

"Oh! might you and would you?"

"I'll see about it. And that was the countess who had just quitted the *salon* before I entered it—to paralyze you, so to speak?"

"Yes."

"A dangerous woman! And I noted the two retainers, likewise. My dear Double, you were not out of the way in your analysis? It is possible that those men may be the witnesses to bring your Creole rogue to the guillotine."

"The guillotine?"

"Yes; dismiss your pet scheme of New York State Prison for him. These Frenchmen will have his head."

CHAPTER XL.

THE REAL FALCONBRIDGE.

"SOMEHOW I never thought of John Burley meeting such a fate," said Eleanor, after a long pause.

"As he had probably never thought of committing a deliberate murder until recently," replied the real detective, gravely. "But look here, I know something of the queer household of Madame la Countesse d'Espigneau, and you don't."

"I am really glad you do."

"Yes," reflectively. "She is doubtless a murderer on her own part—was strongly suspected, and with reason, of poisoning her husband ten or twelve years ago, but somehow it never came to anything. You think this Burley is still under her protection?"

"I haven't a doubt of it; though whether still in Paris or not I haven't an idea."

"That must be determined shortly. But, with all your cleverness, you could never have made your way into the woman's secrets. I can, though too lazy to do so in my own person. And I will undertake the task for you, if you say so."

"Do it!" joyfully. "To whom could or should a double more consistently surrender its plot than to its prototype. Besides, I am heartily sick of this long deception."

"Don't be too sure, though," with his winning smile, "that I'll let you out of it in short order. So fresh a sensation doesn't occur every day in my life, and I am newly arrived from the sweat, the toil, the desert dust and the furnace-heats of the Orient."

"I do hope, sir, that your arduous mission there was successful!"

"Entirely so, thanks!" indifferently. "Got my man and most of his swag at last, and he is now on the ocean, State-prisonward bound under a competent guard. But let us wait patiently a few minutes longer. I am expecting some one looking for me here."

A few minutes later his valuable little assistant, Tommy Dodd—short-haired as a Zouave and sunburned to tan-color, but otherwise the wise little, old-young, irrepressible, dramatic, self-assertive Tommy Dodd of old—put in an appearance.

He gave a slight start at perceiving his distinguished master so oddly, or rather so duplicitously, companioned, but at once resumed his easy-going nothing-could-surprise me air.

"Tommy, my man," said the Falcon Detective, "there's a little job that will be amusement for you. You have had the Countess d'Espigneau pointed out to you?"

"Tis true and pity 'tis 'tis true, my liege," was the deep-voiced, stagey response.

"Rig yourself up in a fitting manner to apply for a place as a page, tiger, or something of the sort, at her hotel, 423 Rue de Helder, on short notice. I will give you fuller instructions this evening. That is all."

Tommy laid his hand on his heart, bowed profoundly, slowly turned with a stagey strut, and then vanished with the celerity of a touched-off rocket.

"What a dear, funny little man!" exclaimed Eleanor, smiling.

"He is a character. But let us think of something entirely different—anti-shop, you know—for the present. My dear Double, will you do me the honor of taking lunch with me at the *Café Anglais*?"

Eleanor hesitated.

"I know that our appearance there will make a sensation," he added, with another of his winning smiles. "But that is what I want just now, and you may extract some amusement out of it, too."

"I will, and gladly," she replied, "if you will promise me something in return."

"What is it?"

"To accompany me home afterward, and be

Old Falcon's Double.

introduced to my husband and my Cousin Hugh."

"Willingly—on yet another condition."

"Name it, sir."

"That I shall also be introduced to Mrs. Charles Howland in her proper person."

"With all my heart!" she cried, gayly, giving him her hand as he extended his; and they accordingly quitted the Louvre together, the best of friends.

No mistake had been made as to the sensation which they really did cause among the *habitués* of the famous *café*, but of that we shall not further speak.

Suffice it to say that the real detective subsequently accompanied his Double to her home, where he was made known to both Howland and Spender, with such amazement on their part as can be left to the reader's imagination, and where, after a brief delay, he made the true acquaintance of the beautiful and daring woman who had duplicated his personality, for the most part so successfully.

"Well, Monsieur Falconbridge," she said, with her dazzling smile, "is it patent to you now how I managed to 'get there' in counterfeiting you, as some of our own Westerners might say?"

She was splendidly dressed, though in the most perfect taste, though she had been without aid in her toilette, as a matter of course—or, in fewer words, she was her bright, lovely, fascinating and darkly beautiful self.

"No, it is not," the great detective frankly admitted, after contemplating her for a moment in complete silence. "Mr. Howland," turning to the two gentlemen, "you are to be congratulated more than any man I know of. You have for a wife, not only a heroine, but the cleverest and ablest woman I ever saw. As for the lady's personal advantages," with a courtly bow for the young wife, "they speak for themselves."

"You do me proud," cried Eleanor, with her clear laugh. "Confess, though, Major Falconbridge, that if it was a man who had thus been counterfeiting you—"

"I would have sued him for big damages on the spot!" was the blunt interruption.

He then joined in the laugh that followed, and shortly afterward took his leave, after promising to communicate whatever progress he might be making.

"Well," said Eleanor, when they were alone, "well, messieurs, what do you think of it all?"

"I hardly know," Cousin Hugh replied for himself, with mock helplessness. "Sometimes I seem to be standing on my head, and sometimes on my heels."

"And my feeling," said her husband, kissing her, "is just this: A sense of absolute and unadulterated joy and gratitude that you are never again to masquerade, or be other than your own dear, noble and womanly self!"

"I sincerely hope so," she replied, returning his kiss with interest. "But if the real Falconbridge should order otherwise for a brief space, I could hardly refuse, out of a just indemnity to him for the felony of his giant's robe in which I concealed my insignificance for so long. And now, my dears, let us go to our *petit dîner*."

CHAPTER XLI.

PROGRESS.

THE next morning they received brief word from Falconbridge, to the effect that Tommy Dodd was duly installed in the establishment of the Countess d'Espigneau as a page, and that everything was in train.

Eleanor determined to first celebrate what she hopefully regarded as her permanent restoration to her true character, by effecting a removal to a better locality and into lodgings in better keeping with her wealth and position, to say nothing of her tastes.

Admirable furnished apartments were secured in the Grande Hotel, and then both she and her husband, together with Hugh Spender, made up for lost time in re-establishing family relations, necessarily neglected till now, with her father and aunt.

Colonel Sherwood, however, was seldom to be seen, his time being almost completely taken with his old Paris friends, of whom he had a very extensive circle.

As for Florine, Eleanor made the sacrifice of continuing to forego the girl's services, that she might still remain a guest of the hotel to her own advantage, inasmuch as her engagement with Captain Tidewell was now a fixed fact, and, as the captain was a gentleman of good family, it would be more agreeable to his pride than if he had taken his bride out of a lady's maid's situation.

But all this was done, with no intimation as yet to the effect of Eleanor having relinquished her personation, or of the true Falconbridge being on the scene, while Colonel Sherwood remained in the general ignorance upon the subject that had been his privilege from the outset.

"Well, my dear," Eleanor observed to Florine, soon after effecting her change of residence, "of course I hope you'll be happy, and I suppose you will."

"Oh, no doubt of it, mademoiselle," and Flo-

rine made a rather poor attempt to cast down her bright eyes and take the congratulation seriously. "Monsieur, my fiancé, is everything that is good and kind."

"Why do you not call him Conrad, as Aunt Jerusha does?"

"Not any more does she, mademoiselle!" exclaimed Florine, indignantly. She wouldn't dare! And as for that photograph of monsieur, which the old thing so surreptitiously obtained, I—Ah, ma'm'selle, I must not lose my temper; but the—the young lady cannot boast of having that in her possession any more."

"I wouldn't mind her, if I were you. When is it to be, my dear?"

"When we get back to New York, mademoiselle, whenever that may be."

"Shall you not hate to quit your native Paris again?"

"No, mademoiselle," with a blushing lowering of the bright eyes that was genuine enough now, "not with monsieur."

"I am glad you are so devoted to him," said Eleanor, heartily. "Mr. Tidewell is an excellent, high-minded gentleman, of a good family, and fairly well off, I believe. And I truly hope and believe you will try to make him an excellent wife."

"Ab, mademoiselle, do not fear that I shall not try," with thorough simplicity, "I love him!"

Eleanor kissed her, and a moment later Miss Bigbee, with her grenadier's stride, came stalking into the apartment which the two had thus far had to themselves.

"Look at her, Eleanor!" exclaimed the spinster, pointing a scornful forefinger at the unabashed Florine. "Doesn't she betray her debasement, her prospective slavery, in her quivering lips and appalled mien?"

"I cannot say that she does, aunt," replied Eleanor, struggling to keep her countenance.

"What! But softly; perhaps you are not aware of her having consented to her abasement, of having signed the death-warrant to her womanhood with her own coward hand?"

"But in what way, aunt?"

"In what way? Why, by bowing her neck to the tyrant yoke, beg consent to become a nameless nothing, a ginerack and a toy—by consenting to be married!"

"Oh, indeed! However, she looks as if she might survive the degradation with some cheerfulness."

"Ha, ha, ha!" with strident mirth. "With cheerfulness—yes; but show me a sadder spectacle under the quiet thunderbolt and the belowing stars than a cheerful slave! Ye cannot—never, though deep calleth unto deep until the welkin howls. Slaves, slaves ever, and to the tyrant, Man!" As she strode out of the room with a Cassandra-like gesture of prophecy and wrath.

While Eleanor and Florine were still laughing, Captain Tidewell called.

Eleanor had not seen him since quitting the Ganymede, which was now undergoing a thorough refitting at Cherbourg, and she was unaffectedly hearty both in her greetings and her congratulations.

"Well, we manage to enjoy ourselves a little, ma'am," said the yacht-master, with a gentle glance toward Florine, whose blushes were that hot and furious as she would have scornfully pronounced *une betise*, or "stupid freshness;" let us say, in another not more than a month previous; "though I think we might do that now quite as well in New York as in Paris."

He seemed to be covered with a quiet and absorbing happiness that was good to behold.

Eleanor only remained to exchange a kiss with her father on his return from the races; but her visits to the apartments of the Grande Hotel were thereafter more frequent.

Nothing was seen of Falconbridge for two days after the receipt of the communication alluded to, though Eleanor had begun to enjoy life a little after the manner of her sex, with an assured feeling that the detective business was now at last in hands that could scarcely procrastinate or fail.

It had cost her pride a little secret pang to feel this way at first, notwithstanding her relief at permanently discarding her unsexing disguise; but she nevertheless was conscious that the business was in his line rather than hers, and that he could fairly demand the task in the light of an indemnity to himself.

At the end of this second day, however, her husband came home to say that he had exchanged a few words with the great detective, who had reported encouraging progress, and had promised to call in the evening.

And a few minutes later Hugh Spender returned from a drive with an unexpectedly met New York friend, to say that he had seen Madame la Comtesse driving her pony phaeton in the Park, with the oddest-looking, little owl-faced, Cockney-appearing tiger in attendance, whom Eleanor was sure must have been none other than the detective's Ariel, Tommy Dodd, notwithstanding that he had been reported as having been engaged as a house-page.

"It is true," explained Falconbridge, when he called a little later on. Tommy is already so high in madame's good graces—she seemed

to have a predilection for Cockneys, to which class she imagines him to belong—that she keeps him in more or less constant attendance upon her person outdoors as well as in. We are getting along swimmingly, so far."

CHAPTER XLII.

CONFIRMATION.

"THAT is excellent news," Eleanor replied, "but then is our fugitive an inmate of madame's hotel, or even still in Paris, major?"

"I can only think so, as yet," was the detective's reply. "Of course, my interviews with Tommy Dodd are secret and few, and he has not yet been able to assure himself on this vitally important point. But I am in strong hopes of obtaining some sort of confirmation as to my impression by to-morrow, at furthest."

The confirmation came sooner than it was looked for.

On his way back to his lodgings from the Howlands' new establishment that night at a rather late hour, the detective availed himself of a short cut through a short narrow little street in the vicinity of the Countess d'Espignau's hotel.

This little street was mostly deserted, strange to say, save at about this hour of the night, when it was not infrequently taken advantage of by certain home-returning guests of the Grande Hotel, and similar neighboring establishments, from the opera or Théâtre Francaise, who might prefer pedestrianism.

On the night in question the detective had only just entered the narrow, poorly lighted street when his keen eyes discovered a novel disturbance at about the middle of the block.

There was a woman's cry, the sudden rush of a masculine figure toward a similar one, which seemed to be knocked down, then a staggering back of the other, after which the floored figure sprung up, and silently darted away.

But by this time the detective was in pursuit like the wind, though having no idea of the identity of the group.

A man and woman were standing together as he flew past them.

"Remain!" he exclaimed, while on the wing; "I shall return."

"Heavens!" said the woman, who was none other than Florine Duprez; "that was mademoiselle herself—or rather Monsieur Falconbridge—who may overtake the wretch, the scelerat. But, Conrad, tell me," anxiously, and while dragging her companion under a street lamp, where she solicitously examined him, "you are sure you are not wounded?"

Her companion was Mr. Tidewell.

"Quite sure of it, my dear Florine," was the reply, with a short laugh. "It was almost as close a call for me as for you—for who would have thought of a knife to come hurtling at me from the rascal after I had knocked him down? But his first assault upon you! What on earth could it have meant? He did not succeed in touching you, though, the Lord be praised!"

Now that the peril was past, Florine was clinging to him under the lamp, pale and trembling.

"Ah, monsieur, don't be too sure," she murmured. "True, I was not even scratched, but look here!"

She exhibited the side of her mantle, or light opera cloak, where it had been completely cut through by the knife—a long, vicious slash, that had also left its mark on her dress-waist at the same side.

"Good God!" exclaimed Tidewell; "it must have been aimed direct at your heart. This is terrible! Let me see if I can find the dagger. I thought I heard it ping into something hereabouts, after feeling the wind of it on my face. By the way," while looking about him, "was the stranger who dashed past us really Mrs. Howland in her detective character, whose secret you have lately let me into?"

She could only murmur an affirmative, while still trying to recover her composure; for Florine had recognized the assailant as John Burley, which was more than a sufficient excuse for her unusual lack of nerve.

At this moment the detective returned to them.

"I was unsuccessful," he growled, half-angrily. "However, I saw him disappear into the side-court of the Hotel d'Espignau, or somewhere thereabouts, so that there may be a chance of tracking him. How did it all happen?"

"Oh, mademoiselle!" Florine had not even yet got used to the *madame* of her whilom mistress's married status—"it was horrible. But first say you will forgive my having let monsieur into your secret."

Falconbridge had before this made himself familiar with Eleanor's entire family connections and associations, together with their relation to the quest on hand.

"It doesn't much matter, my dear," he replied, with a slight smile over the odd complication of the case. "Besides, how could you be expected to retain any secret from 'monsieur'? But explain."

Florine had by this time recovered something of her native vivacity and assurance.

"We were returning to our hotel from the

opera," you must know, she went on, "when suddenly that ruslan started from a doorway yonder—I was a little in the advance at the moment, by reason of the narrowness of the walk, and he was doubtless unaware of my being accompanied—there was the flash of a blade, and he made a lunge at me, while muttering something terrible between his teeth."

"I swerved to one side, with a scream, just in time to save myself. Look at my lovely mantle, ma'm'selle—hopelessly ruined, and newly presented to me by monsieur, at that! Tuen monsieur was upon him like a raging lion. *Ciel!* never before did I see the terrible, annihilating courage as displayed by monsieur at that frightful moment of contact when—"

"Non-sense!" interrupted Tidewell, coming under the light from his search, with a laugh. "I merely knocked the rascal down, and, as he fell, he let fly at me with the knife by some sort of trick that sent it straight out of his hand, like a bolt from a bow-gun. Then he was up and away. Here is the knife. I have just found it sticking in yonder door, and so deeply imbedded that it was with some difficulty I extracted it from the wood."

He held up the weapon as he spoke—a stiletto of the clasp or bowie-knife variety, particularly murderous-looking, and of rather unique pattern.

"I'll take that, if you have no objection, my friend."

And, Tidewell being perfectly willing to surrender it, the detective took the knife, and put it in his pocket, after a cursory examination.

"You say, my dear," addressing Florine, "the fellow said something to you at the first moment of his attempt? What were his words?"

"Oh, ma'm'selle! of course, you must have guessed his identity, which I recognized in a flash? It was that wicked Juan Borleo!"

"Ah! humph! of course! But what were the words?"

"These"—and Florine shuddered: "'*This to your heart, Florine, on the old account! Juan Borleo never forgets!*'"

"Quite an adventure for you, to be sure. Good-night for the present now, and take care of yourselves."

The detective waited until the couple had fairly gained the brilliantly-lighted boulevard at the end of the little street, and then strode away.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE TRAIL GROWING HOT.

FALCONBRIDGE was at the Howland apartments, with his account of the adventure, at quite an early hour on the following morning.

In fact, Eleanor had not quite finished her coffee in the pretty little breakfast-room of the suite, and Charles and Hugh were just beginning to look into the newsless French newspapers which had been laid before them.

"Here is the knife," said the detective, after creating his first sensation by a terse recital of the incident, and he held up the stiletto unclasped. "Does any one of you chance to recognize the pattern?"

Eleanor nodded, after pushing back her cup, while her husband and Cousin Hugh eyed the weapon more curiously.

"John Burley, otherwise Juan Borleo, must have a good supply of this pattern of cutlery," observed the detective, for their especial enlightenment. "It is the companion to the knife that was found buried in Joseph Razzo's breast. I had the privilege of inspecting that one at the Prefecture the other day."

"But this ought to be encouraging, after all, major," cried Hugh. "You say you saw the villain disappear in Madame d'Espigneau's court-yard?"

"Yes."

"Why, then we've got sure track of him at last—are already hot on his heels!"

"And here is another witness that will help send him to the guillotine!"

After saying which, the detective once more put the knife out of sight; and then, by way of an agreeable diversion, he related how he, the detective, had passed current as merely the detective's Double, with both Florine and her betrothed.

"I don't wonder at it," cried Eleanor, laughing, "for she still imagines me to be in the counterfeiting business on occasion, and all of us here have discreetly kept our own counsel thus far as to the real state of the case."

"No harm will be done by leaving things as they are for the present," said Falconbridge; "though naturally," with a half-smile, "it might place me in a delicate situation with Miss Florine."

"You will doubtless see little more of her before there is no longer any need of the deception," observed Howland. "But now do you think Burley to be cornered in Madame d'Espigneau's hotel?"

"Yes; but I am waiting for a chance to hear what my little friend, Tommy Dodd, may have to report. You see—"

Here he was interrupted by a light, swift step on the main staircase without, and, holding up a finger, bent his ear to listen.

"Ah, I was sure of it," he said.

Then, after a light, preliminary knock, the door opened, and Tommy Dodd himself was before them.

He had received intimation of the Howlands' change of residence before taking up his part in the household of Madame d'Espigneau.

Tommy was looking flustered and out of breath, but his general appearance was a success.

He was in his London tiger's costume, and looked like a toy man just out of a bandbox.

"Our man's in the hotel!" he burst out, irrespective of the company present, as soon as he could get his breath. "But he will quit it for the Belgian frontier one hour hence—at ten o'clock—disguised as the Abbe d'Hauteville, madame's confessor. But beware of some hoodwinking trick of madame's. That is all. Must hurry back, or I shall be missed. Boss, I'm your daisy!"

With that, he was gone as abruptly as he had entered.

"It was enough," said Falconbridge, rising. "No time is to be lost. Mrs. Howland?" with a look of hesitating inquiry.

Eleanor had also risen.

"I hate to ask it, knowing your dislike for the dodge, but—"

"I know what you would say," with a submissive gesture. "I must again be your Double?"

He bowed.

"But for once more—the very last time, I trust. If a duplication should be attempted on their part, I really see no other way."

"Say no more, my friend."

She disappeared, nervously swishing back the train of her exquisite white morning wrapper, snowily lace-trimmed and delicately striped with lace insertions, as she did so; and, in a surprisingly short space of time, with everything considered, she reappeared in her counterfeit presentment, complete.

The real Falconbridge nodded his approval, while both Howland and Spender gave a surprising start at the fidelity of the imitation on being subjected before their eyes to this most difficult and practical test of comparison.

Even the prior slight differences of costume had been amended, and though the real detective was somewhat the browner and more careworn of the pair, by reason of his recent sun-baking in the Syrian deserts, this variation only made itself apparent upon the closest critical comparison.

"Listen, my friends," said Falconbridge. "We will take it for granted that the Belgium frontier is our fugitive's hoped-for destination, as reported, because it is the easiest attainable.

"I know the Abbe d'Hauteville, madame's confessor, by sight. He is an old and courtly gallant of the old regime, whose habit and facial characteristics could be readily duplicated by an expert, such as Burley may have proved himself to be by this time, and he is, moreover, a creature of the countess's money and influence.

"I apprehended that our, or rather *my*, watchfulness is feared, and that an attempt will be made to embarrass this by two departures from the hotel, closely following each other; the one being that of the *bona fide* abbe himself, the other his counterfeit, who will be our fugitive; though there is no telling which will take the lead.

"Now, there are two railways, with stations adjoining each other, by which the Belgian frontier may be reached with about equal facility, or but little difference in that regard. These are the North Railway, and the Strasbourg Railway, which, with the former by a branch at Artois, five miles beyond the fortifications. Thereafter the main lines run parallel with each other, at about three miles apart, as far as M—, ten miles further out, in the vicinity of which point each has its M— station. After that they diverge, the Strasbourg line making a grand sweeping curve for the southeast, while the North keeps on direct for the Belgian frontier.

"Now, in order to complete the game of confusion, one abbe will take one route, the other (either the real one, or his counterfeit) the other.

"But the fact of there being two Falconbridges, no less than two Abbe d'Hautvilles, in the field is not among the otherwise shrewd calculations of our Creole rascal, I am certain.

"I shall first take my watch at the entrance of the hotel, with a carriage in readiness; while you, my dear Monsieur Double, must conceal yourself in the deep door of an old-fashioned house directly opposite—which I have noticed to be vacant—also with a carriage at call.

"I wish you to take up after the real abbe, if possible. Therefore, if you should receive my signal to that effect, you will follow the first of the pair that appears; while if I shadow him, you of course will attend to the duplicate who may follow."

CHAPTER XLIV.

DOUBLES AGAINST DOUBLES.

As the Falcon Detective came to a slight pause in this extraordinary mapping-out of action in the presumptive situation, the two gen-

tlemen looked at him in simple amazement, while Eleanor, her enthusiasm once more warming to the exciting work but so recently relinquished, smiled and nodded her sympathetic approval.

"Major," she cried, "I don't see how I ever found the temerity to merely attempt your reproduction, with nothing but my poor brain to support it. The giant's robe again, as a matter of course. But how long are we to follow our respective abbes, real or counterfeit as the case may be, and what is to ensue?"

"I was just coming to that," continued Falconbridge, who then continued: "We must discover the value of our respective charges—genuineness, you understand—before reaching M—, and either make the arrest, or so excite their apprehensions, as the case may be, as to compel a desertion of the trains, on their part, at that point. The two stations are a mile apart, and separated by a broken and wooded country, but they are in telegraphic communication.

"Now, upon your arriving at M—, should you find that my judgment is at fault, and that your abbe is the false one, but the real criminal, you will, after first inducing him to flee from the train, at once communicate the fact to me at the other station, after which you can keep your man in sight, or follow him into the forest, which will naturally be his first seeking for concealment. But I would not have you attempt to cope with him single-handed."

"Eleanor must not think of such a thing!" interposed Charles Howland, excitedly. "Can we forget the Corsican's fate? And only to think of her being confronted by John Burley when fairly brought to bay!"

"That has been provided for," replied Falconbridge. "I was about to suggest that both you gentlemen be on the lookout, so as to take Mrs. Howland's train, whichever one it may prove to be, as far as M—. That is all, I believe." He looked at his watch. "We have but half an hour in which to dispose ourselves."

"Wait, please," said Eleanor. "Suppose my quarry should prove to be the real abbe?"

"You will then pay no further attention to him, but merely await a dispatch from me at your M— Station."

"And in case your quarry should prove the disguised criminal himself?"

"Oh!" indifferently, and abruptly rising; "that is to be hoped, of course, and would reduce the entire complication to simplicity. I shall have him bracelets before he can make up his mind whether he is in France or Belgium. But come; no more time is to be consumed in talk."

Twenty minutes or so later on, Eleanor found herself installed in the doorway of the empty house alluded to. Her hired coach was just around a street corner, in full view, however, from the windows of the countess's residence, directly opposite, though she was satisfied that she had effected her concealment without attracting attention therefrom.

A little further along the boulevard was another coach in waiting, and near it stood Falconbridge, interestingly watching the entrance, and without the least attempt at concealment.

The hotel, or city residence, of Madame d'Espigneau, was a lofty, narrow-windowed and rather gloomy four-storied brick building, with a sort of courtyard at the rear—to which access was obtainable by the narrow side street, at whose corner the edifice stood (and the same in which Florine had so narrowly escaped the murderous attempt of the preceding night)—and whose ground floor was entirely taken up by the wide arched entrance, or *porte cochere*, with its prison-like grating, and the concierge's little windowed den to one side of it.

Though secretly excited as she had scarcely ever been before in her assumption of her difficult misquarade (for she felt that she was now for the first time in action under the somber, critical gaze of her falcon-eyed original himself,) Eleanor preserved her outward calm and nonchalance, and kept constantly on the alert, the facade of the opposite hotel and Falconbridge's person dividing her attention.

At last it was within a minute or two of ten o'clock.

Prompt to the moment the gate of the *porte cochere* swung back, the *concierge*, followed by Louis, the secretary, and Felix, the old valet, made his appearance, standing back with obsequious expectancy, and, as a close coach, drawn by spirited horses, came rolling out from under the deep, tunnel-like arch, a venerable and priestly figure slowly stepped into view.

At a sign from the *concierge*, the coach came to a pause at the foot of stone steps under the arch, and, as the door was reverently opened for him, the priest moved slowly forward to enter.

As he did so, however, his glance, apparently for the first time, alighted upon the seemingly indifferent Falconbridge.

He started slightly, fumbled in his vestment, as if with the pretext of having forgotten something, and, with a gesture of penitence, which was also probably accompanied by some words to the attendants, withdrew.

Almost instantly, however, he reappeared—or

his exact likeness did—and getting into the coach without further delay, was driven away.

Now if there could have been a more pronounced manifestation of a ruse stimulated into action—of the counterfeit abbe giving place to the real one on the former perceiving the detective on watch—one would have thought that it was here; and Eleanor was at once on the alert for the signal that she should take up the chase.

Judge then of her surprise at seeing Falconbridge quietly step into his coach, and follow on after, as a signal that he had got the right man, and that she must take the next comer.

Then followed the duplication, in absolute confirmation of the Falcon Detective's marvelous accuracy of divination.

The three retainers went back into the house, to return again in less than a couple of minutes, as a preliminary to the exact reproduction of the same scene.

Another coach came to a pause at the foot of the stone steps, and another abbe, the precise external image of his predecessor, stepped into view.

But now it was the abbe's (or the abbe's counterfeit, whichever it might be) turn to manifest embarrassment.

For at the same moment Nelly, as the detective's Double, issued from her crypt and stood calmly waiting.

What! were there two Falconbridges, no less than two abbes?

The second priest had stood irresolute, and was evidently in a state of unaffected hesitation.

However, it would seem that there was more risk in drawing back than going on.

The man stepped into his coach and was driven away, just as his predecessor had been, while Nelly imitated her prototype's example by summoning her carriage, and setting off in pursuit.

Her action had been duly marked by her husband and Hugh Spender from a convenient distance, and they lost no time in following.

Estella's fugitive led her to the depot of the Strasbourg Railway.

He tried in vain to elude her among the throngs, but as the train was on the point of starting he at last desperately entered one of the first-class compartments, and she was at his heels.

At the same instant she had the satisfaction of seeing Charles and Hugh enter the next compartment behind.

Then there was a whistle, it was succeeded by another, like an echo, from the adjoining depot, and the two trains of the parallel lines were simultaneously under way.

CHAPTER XLV.

WHICH!

ELEANOR found herself and her fugitive the sole occupants of their compartment-coach.

The latter, now thoroughly self-possessed, externally at least, produced a newspaper, adjusted a pince-nez, that was thickly rimmed with gold, and was soon to all appearances absorbed in his corner.

"I wonder which he can be—the real or false abbe—the true criminal, or the priest who is shielding his escape?" thought Eleanor, furtively eying her companion with mingled curiosity and dread. "What would I not give to know?"

Then, as the train was approaching the fortifications, she glanced out of the compartment window at her side, which was the one having the parallel track of the North Railway, but a few rods distant at this place, in view.

The train of that line was also moving out, directly athwart the intervening space.

She caught her breath joyfully as she perceived a man making a slight but encouraging signal to her from a window of the rival train.

It was Falconbridge himself, and his signal seemed to say, "Be of good heart! no mistake has been made."

Then she fell to thinking of what an extraordinary man he was, and how accurately, with little short of a mysterious prevision, or clairvoyance, he had divined the ruse that would be attempted, and taken his measures accordingly.

After that she also produced a newspaper, and pretended to read as a mask for her constant and assiduous study of her compartment companion.

We have said that she puzzled herself over his identity with a mingled curiosity and dread, a word heretofore little worth-considering in the daring young woman's composition.

But this was before the murder of the Corsican, Joseph Razio, and when she had never considered the Creole's character other than that of an unscrupulous, perhaps desperate, adventurer and robber.

But a murderer, too! From the moment of her conviction that he was that also—that he was an assassin, with his hands reddened with the deliberate and ruthless spilling of human blood—her womanliness had never been able to think of him with no less horror than detestation.

She now not only hated, but feared him.

It will therefore be readily seen with what new trepidation, in spite of the comparative security she still felt in her fictitious personality,

she debated the question as to whether the detective might not have made a mistake, and left her to deal with the now terrible Juan Borleo himself, while getting on the track of the harmless churchman on his own part.

Besides, notwithstanding Falconbridge's reassuring signal, she could not get over the impression that this man, her coach companion, whether the dreaded Creole in disguise or not, was something other than he seemed.

True, he paid her not the slightest attention, seemingly wholly absorbed, and what she could see of the venerable face, covered with a long white mustache and closely-cropped white beard—an unusual thing with French prelates, most of whom are close-shaven—appeared to be perfectly natural; but the plump white little hands were too small and delicately shaped even for a priest's, she was quite sure; there was a studied grace of attitude in the short, rather fleshy person that would have seemed more in keeping, or so she thought, with an actor's garb than the sacred vestment that was its habit, while yet other characteristics seemed to deepen the impression alluded to.

However, the train was speeding rapidly, and Artois was already passed. The next place, only ten miles further on—less than that now—would be M—.

If she was to induce or compel her enigmatical companion to quit the train there, in accordance with the detective's instructions, she had better make a beginning, or be thinking how to make it.

Less than five miles left now. She summoned her best assurance to her aid, and shifting her seat, placed herself directly *vis-à-vis* to him.

"Monsieur l'Abbe!" said the detective's Double, politely but with a ring of resolution in her voice.

The other looked up from his reading, with a well-simulated start of surprise.

"Well, my son?" he calmly asked, in a musical and effeminate voice.

"It is absolutely necessary that I should thus interrupt you, monsieur."

"Necessary! and why, pray?" with a freshly surprised air.

"Because, Monsieur l'Abbe, you were so absorbed in your reading that you might forget you are to leave the train at M—, which is now but two or three miles distant."

"Thanks, my son; but you mistake. I have no intention of stopping at M—."

"Pardon me, sir, but it is my intention that you shall."

Down went the newspaper, and up straightened Monsieur l'Abbe, both indignant and curious, or seemingly so.

"Sir!" he exclaimed, with a slight tremor in the effeminate voice; "you have doubtless taken leave of your senses?"

"Not at all," coolly; "though you, monsieur, will assuredly take leave of this train at M—."

"Ha, ha! this is refreshing!"

"You will then, monsieur," smiling, "be in the less need of purchasing refreshment at M—."

"But I sha'n't get off at M—. I am on my way to the frontier."

"You shall stop over at M—."

"What do you take me for, sir?"

"A dishonest man, doing his best to aid a thief and a murderer to escape the consequences of his crimes!"

"Sir! sir! I do not know what you mean."

"You will be more or less enlightened at M—."

"Who are you?"

"Falconbridge, the Falcon Detective!" after an instant's hesitation.

"Well," after a slight start, "I don't care who you may be. I have had about enough of your insufferable insolence!" and he made a suspicious movement.

Quick as a flash, Eleanor covered him with her revolver.

No further fears now as to the abbe being Burley, or as to the great detective's penetration having been at fault.

The abbe had suddenly collapsed, trembling like a leaf, his face, white to ghastliness, the picture of unrelieved, absolute, genuine, and agonized womanish fear.

"Ah, Monsieur l'Abbe, and do you submit?"

"I do," was the stammered and unqualified reply.

"The train is slowing up. Prepare to quit the train at my side. If you call attention to your treachery, or fail to obey my slightest word or sign, I shall cheerfully blow out your pious brains."

As she stepped out of the train, the abbe was glued to her side like a terrorized hound.

Eleanor first entered the station and telegraphed to the detective, announcing her arrival and success.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE CREOLE AT BAY.

The return dispatch came almost instantly as follows:

"All well! Meet me midway in the wooded interval with your prize. F."

With her captive literally in tow, she at

once quitted the station platform, and started along a narrow footpath leading directly westward through the woods.

It promised to be a lonely walk, but she no longer held her Monsieur l'Abbe in anything but contempt, and was, moreover, quite sure that Charles and Hugh, whom she had seen alight from the train, would not be far behind.

However, at least somewhat of the abbe's pusillanimity proved to have been assumed.

They had hardly got fairly into the solitude before he set out to run, and then, before his captor could recover from her surprise, he suddenly turned with a leveled revolver, and fired.

But Eleanor had instinctively dropped upon her hands and knees, and so opportunely that the bullet flew wide of its mark.

Then, springing forward, in a fit of exasperation, that was a sufficient foil to any trepidation she might otherwise have felt, and with her own weapon leveled, she had him disarmed and at her mercy in a trice.

At this juncture, Howland and Spender, alarmed by the shot, came running up.

"Why don't you handcuff the old hypocrite?" cried Hugh.

"He dared to shoot at you!" exclaimed Charles, who was greatly agitated on his wife's account. "Let us give him a sound thrashing first!"

"Neither," coolly replied the detective's double, once more fully self-possessed. "Monsieur l'Abbe, forward march!"

She held a pistol in either hand now, and the captive did not wait for a repetition of the command.

As they were approaching what they thought must be the midway point between the two stations, there was suddenly a tremendous explosion from somewhere a little further on.

They rushed forward to investigate, the abbe with no less eagerness than the others.

There was a scuffling, tramping and snarling sound, such as might have proceeded from a wounded tiger suddenly finding himself in his hunter's snare.

Then, as they entered a little open glade, a strange and terrible spectacle was before them.

The further side of the space was covered with the freshly scattered leaves and branches of trees, a great, smoking hole was in the ground, and over and around the spot there was a haze of dust, together with a heavy, rather sickening smell.

On the turf directly at their feet, two forms, scarcely recognizable as those of human beings, so close was their clutching struggle, so rapid their writhing and twisting movements, which raised a constant and thick dust, were engaged in such a clinching, clawing, wild-beast strife as not one of the appalled spectators had ever witnessed, or perhaps conceived of, before.

The snarls, and they were now distinguished as mixed with curses and oaths, seemed to come from but one of the contestants, while the other was silent.

But scarcely had the new-comers arrived, before Falconbridge's clear, calm voice rang out from somewhere amid the writhing, struggling, mass as it might be called.

"Don't interfere!" it cried; "I can manage him."

Here a fresh surprise was occasioned by Eleanor's captive clasping his hands and giving utterance to a wild, womanish wail.

"Who and what are you?" cried Eleanor, suddenly seizing the priestly figure.

"Don't touch me, scorpion!" screamed the other, wildly. "Do you not see that my love, my Juan, is being torn to pieces before my eyes? Wolves, sleuth-hounds! have you no pity, no remorse?"

Then, by a few frenzied gestures and clutches, the abbe's robe disappeared in one direction, a white wig in another, a false mustache and beard in yet another, and the astounded trio were no longer confronted by a wailing prelate, but a furious and agonized woman, who was none other than Madame la Comtesse d'Espeignau.

Moreover, she was so richly and even fashionably habited—save that she was devoid of crinoline of any sort—in garments suitable to her sex that Eleanor could scarcely credit the deception that had been practiced upon her; while the woman's long and still abundant and beautiful blonde hair, loosened from the disguising shave-pato wig that had in some manner managed to fetter and conceal its luxuriance, tumbled about her angry face and shapely shoulders in a sunny storm.

She continued to rave, but, notwithstanding their continued astonishment, Eleanor and her companions turned to the struggle going on at their side, as being the master sensation of the two.

At length there was a tremendous spasm in the fight. Then came the sound of terrible, swiftly-repeated blows, which was followed by the click of handcuffs, and the awful spectacle was at an end.

Covered with dirt and dust, and with his clothing torn in many places, but otherwise uninjured—one might almost add, unruffled—the

Old Falcon's Double.

Falcon Detective quietly came out of the mist and dust of it all, calm and erect.

The man who lay bleeding, torn, handcuffed, half-senseless, behind him, with his disarming priestly garb in rags, was John Burley.

"A tougher job than I had looked for!" remarked Falconbridge, stooping down to a little spring of water near at hand, and beginning to remove the grime and dust from his hands and face, even without ceasing his explanation. But it was partly my own fault for being taken in by the villain's submissive plea that I would not humiliate him with the bracelets at once. I thought it would make no difference so long as I kept him covered; but who the deuce could have dreamed of his having a dynamite bomb in his possession?"

"A bomb!" exclaimed his Double, half-agast.

He shrugged his shoulders, while shaking the water out of his hair, and pointed to the stripped saplings and torn-up earth on the opposite side of the glade.

"The deuce, yes! He threw it too hard, however, besides missing my head, which was his amiable target, and the next instant I was upon him. A tough job, though. But, come now; I'm somewhat in trim again; so we'll lose no time in handing our prisoners over to the Paris authorities."

Burley presented a hideous and pitiable spectacle.

But they managed to restore him to consciousness, and wash him up a bit, after which he maintained a sullen silence, but proceeded along with his captors submissively.

The countess had been very demonstrative and tender in her ministrations.

"You have committed no crime, my dear love," said she, just before the procession was formed. "Fear nothing. I shall hurry back to Paris by some private conveyance, in advance of these rustians, in order to procure you legal and medical assistance."

"You'll do nothing of the sort, ma'm!" interposed Falconbridge, grimly. "You'll go back with us just as we are; and you'll not enter your hotel again till I interview a couple of your retainers there who may chance to know something of a certain murder in the Bois de Boulogne but a short time ago. All in readiness, my friends!"

CHAPTER XLVII.

"THE WAYS OF THE TRANSGRESSOR."

ON arriving in Paris, Falconbridge lost no time in turning over the captured Burley to the custody of the Prefect, with such information as opened that functionary's eyes pretty wide as to the capacity and secrecy of American detectives even on a foreign soil.

He then requested the services of one of the regular detectives of the Prefecture, and Madame la Comtesse was thus accompanied back to her hotel.

There the municipal officer held strict guard over her in one room, while Falconbridge summoned the secretary and the old valet before him.

He directly charged them both with having witnessed the murder of Joseph Razzio at Burley's hands.

Felix, the valet, remained as steadfast as a rock in his denial, and doubtless Louis, the secretary, would have been equally reticent had he been in his mistress's presence.

But he was naturally infirm of purpose, and in the absence of the countess's support, he at last gave way.

Both he and Felix, according to his confession, had accompanied the Creole, at their mistress's express order, to his rendezvous with the Corsican. The secretary had before this informed the countess of his having discovered Razzio in close conversation with the American detective, as he thought; and both he and Felix, it was admitted, had thought that Burley meant to tax the Corsican with contemplating treachery, but Louis swore earnestly that neither he nor his fellow-retainer had the slightest idea of a more tragic consequence until the very instant when Burley, immediately on coming in Razzio's presence, and without an instant's warning, sprung upon him like a tiger, and stabbed him to the heart.

It should have been mentioned that a judge *d'instruction*, or examining magistrate, had also been sent for by Falconbridge, and it was at his inquisition, aided by the detective, that the preliminary confession, as set forth in the foregoing, was made.

It was subsequently corroborated in every particular by Felix, the old valet.

It was then thought there were enough grounds in the two men's testimony to warrant the arrest of the countess herself, on a charge of accessory before the fact, and this was accordingly done.

Of course, the entire affair was the sensation of the day in Paris.

But, notwithstanding that the countess was in distinctly bad odor almost everywhere, in spite of her great wealth, it was decided, upon more formal examinations being brought about, that no case could be made out against her and she was finally released.

She then heroically devoted herself to ministering to the comfort of the culprit, Burley, otherwise Borleo, by every means in her power before the time ordered for his trial.

He had maintained a stubborn reticence and indifference to his fate from the very first hour of his capture.

However, a fortnight before his trial he suddenly requested and obtained permission to see Colonel Sherwood alone.

"You were a weak man, sir," said the prisoner, to his former employer, "but you had always treated me pretty decently, and I forgive you."

"The deuce you do," exclaimed the banker. "Well, you're very magnanimous, to be sure; and, if cheek could save you, you might be out of your present difficulties in short order."

Burley laughed, and, writing something on a slip of paper, he handed it to the colonel.

"Take this to Madame la Comtesse d' Espignau," he said. "She will give you a small valise of mine which I gave her for safe-keeping. She has no positive idea of its contents, but you will find them to consist of about eighteen thousand dollars of the original twenty thousand I took from your safe. You see, I have been rather frugal, after all."

The colonel was so gratified that he suggested some of the money might be used for the prisoner's legal expenses.

"You were always kind, no less than weak," replied the Creole, with a sneer. "But your offer is unnecessary. Adele—the countess, you know—is attending to my expenses. However, you might say to her from me that I am beginning to take an interest in sacred affairs," he seemed to keep his countenance with difficulty, "and would appreciate some professional visits from Monsieur the Abbe d'Hauteville, her confessor—the real abbe this time, you understand," with a laugh. "That is all."

"But can't I do anything more than this for you?" asked Sherwood.

"Yes, one thing," replied the prisoner.

"What is that?"

"Secure for me three minutes alone with Florine Duprez!" with a diabolical laugh, his fingers working convulsively, and with the face of a demon.

The colonel lost no time in delivering the note and message to the countess.

She gave him the little valise, whose contents had not been misstated; and thus, with the exception of two thousand dollars, his stolen fortune was unexpectedly restored to him.

In accordance with the prisoner's request, the priest was permitted to pay him regular visits, and it was thought that Burley must be growing truly penitent.

But the consolatory visits came to an end on the day before his trial for the murder of Joseph Razzio in a manner that occasioned some surprise.

Falconbridge chanced to be in the *conciergerie* of the prison when the abbe was passing through it after what was understood as his farewell visit to the prisoner.

The American detective greatly surprised the jailer and guards by incontinently seizing the holy man by the throat, and pinning him against the rough stone wall.

Their surprise, however, was of a different sort when he proceeded to strip off the priestly vestment, to the revelation of John Burley, otherwise Juan Borleo, beneath.

"You will doubtless find the real Monsieur l'Abbe in this rogue's cell," said Falconbridge, quietly. "You Frenchmen are too easily hoodwinked, I am afraid."

But even Falconbridge was slightly 'out' on this occasion.

It was not the real abbe, but Madame la Comtesse herself, who was found to have remained in the cell, after giving the Creole the priestly garb, under which he would undoubtedly have effected his escape, but for the detective's vigilance.

This trick caused the countess some further trouble with the authorities, but once again her wealth and influence ultimately extricated her.

There was another surprise at the Creole's trial.

He had been so doggedly reticent up to this time, even to the extent of persistently refusing all legal assistance, that it had been generally supposed he would offer no defense.

But he astonished everybody by firmly protesting his innocence of the crime with which he was charged, and announcing that he would conduct his own defense.

And this, moreover, he proceeded to do with rare firmness and ability, though it availed him nothing.

The testimony of the secretary and valet was clear and indisputable, added to which was the comparison of the fatal knife with the one with which the life of Florine Duprez had subsequently been attempted, together with proofs that the prisoner had possessed several remaining weapons of a precisely similar pattern.

He was found guilty, and promptly sentenced to death, as had been a foregone conclusion.

"Of course, I never thought there was any chance for me," he said, with a laugh, when all was over. "But I couldn't resist the opportunity

of giving them all the trouble possible. I would die perfectly happy if but one last boon were granted me—three minutes of solitude and unrestricted freedom, alone with the young woman Florine Duprez."

The few remaining days of this rather extraordinary criminal were passed in reading French novels—of which, strange to say, the very best and more moral were his favorites—and receiving bouquets from ladies.

He finally met his fate on the guillotine with quiet courage and fortitude.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

CONCLUSION.

ELEANOR and her party had returned to New York directly after the trial.

Florine and Captain Tidewell were married in Colonel Sherwood's house in the following October.

Eleanor had always loved the girl, and, as she never did anything by halves, it was her care that the wedding should be a fine affair.

"Our own wedding, Charles," she said, with a loving look at her husband, "was sufficiently bizarre for a lifetime, notwithstanding that it has ended so happily. But Florine and Tidewell's must be altogether joyous, and both you and Cousin Hugh must help me to make it so."

She had already presented Florine with a handsome dowry. Colonel Sherwood gave away the bride. She was looking very beautiful, while her groom was becomingly happy. Curiosity is a wonderful incentive, and the numerous company present was as fashionable as might have attended Eleanor's own wedding under like favorable and propitious circumstances.

Captain Tidewell gave up the sea as a vocation, and started in the ship chandlery business in New York, being successful from the start.

Florine has made him a truly excellent wife, and her happiness has been exceptionally great—perhaps greater than she altogether deserved, some may think, but it must not be forgotten that the rewards and penalties of this world are never adjusted and apportioned with any perfect degree of nicety, else there might be little better to hope for in the world to come.

Eleanor has never since essayed the difficult part of a detective's Double, and she is sincerely hopeful that there may never be occasion for her resumption of the role.

Howland and she have become great travelers, and spend much of their lives abroad. They are at the present hour of writing sojourning in Switzerland, where they are serenely happy with their little children around them.

Hugh Spender is still flourishing in his profession, and he continues to enjoy life in a quiet and rational manner like the sterling and good fellow that he is. But he remains a bachelor, and will probably be a confirmed one; for he never seemed to specially care for any young woman's society except his Cousin Eleanor's, and she is perhaps his only feminine correspondent to-day. Might he have been secretly and hopelessly in love with her from the very first? That is a question that must be left to the reader's conjecture, as it is a secret which only his heart could answer; and, as Hugh is a lawyer, there is but little likelihood of any such testimony, one way or the other, ever coming to the light.

Colonel Sherwood gave up the banking business soon after his return from Paris, and not long after that lost what remained to him of his inconsiderable fortune in an ill-advised speculation. He is now "retired" more fortunately than is often the lot of feeble, selfish and insufficient characters of his sort. That is, he lends a quiet, agreeable and aimless club life in New York on a good income cheerfully accorded him out of his daughter's large estate.

Last, but not least, Miss Jerusha Bigbee still maintains her rather frigid self-poise and championship of the supposed rights of her sex, as the proprietress of a thriving little stationery and candy shop, in which her niece readily started her at her special request; though it was and remains a mystery what could have turned the spinster's predilections in the direction of sweet-meats, whereas if she had manifested a desire to set up as a pickle manufacturer or dispenser, there would have been less occasion for wonder in her case.

Miss Bigbee has never married—women of her specially heroic mold seldom do; and, as she is now past fifty (she confesses to forty), the chances of her deigning to unbend to the extent of selecting a life-mate from among the world of male monsters are attenuated, to say the least.

However, she is still prominent at Woman Suffrage Conventions, and the like, and the platforms are many where her rhetoric and misquotations are at home; though it may be doubted if her efforts are always appreciated by the really bright, brave and intellectual women who are distinguishing themselves so nobly in demanding and obtaining the true rights of their sex as the world rolls on.

The only original Falconbridge is still to be found in the vocation which he adorns, and his odd little assistant, Tommy Dodd, is now as ever his right-hand man.

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